00059674

Digitized with financial assistance from
Mrs.Padma Barve
on 13 March, 2020

REASON AND FAITH

ETC.

LONDON
PRINTED BY SPOTTISWOODE AND CO.
NEW-STREET SQUARE

REASON AND FAITH:

WITH OTHER ESSAYS.

59674

BY HENRY ROGERS.

LONDON:
LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
1866.

I04
Rog/Rea
59674

PREFACE.

OF the first Essay in this volume (originally published in the Edinburgh Review, No. clxxxii., Oct. 1849) there have been, in different forms, eight impressions. It has now for some time been out of print. I have delayed its reissue, partly because I felt it was due to the public, who have so indulgently received it, to give it once more a leisurely revision; and partly because I wished to append to it a discussion of some kindred topics, which will be found treated in the subsequent Essays.

It was my first intention to recast the Essay on Reason and Faith, and divide it into chapters; but I found that the peculiarities of form originally imposed on it by its having been written for a Review, so clung to it, that it was not easy to do this without entirely rewriting it. I therefore abandoned this design; but, in order to indicate the course of thought and to facilitate reference, I have prefixed a table of contents,

in which the succession of topics, and the space given to each, are carefully marked.

On the whole, the alterations made are neither few nor trivial; some portions have been abridged, and others extended; the additions, however, on the whole, being largely in excess of the omissions. The articles which formerly stood in the appendix have been (with the exception of that on Strauss) incorporated into the Essay; and several passages have been transposed.

A few expressions, which gave the Essay a needlessly controversial air, have been gladly struck out, and for similar reasons some references to certain publications of the day, naturally enough introduced into a review of current literature, have been omitted, as no longer likely to interest the reader.

Should any reader discover here and there a passage from articles inserted in other 'Quarterlies' besides the 'Edinburgh,' he will be kind enough to bear in mind that I am as little guilty of plagiarism as he can be guilty of poaching who shoots over his own manor.

On one point I have given a somewhat fuller expression to my views in consequence of a remark made by the Rev. A. S. Farrar, the able and estimable author of the Bampton Lectures for 1862. I know not, indeed, how it is that he has misapprehended my

opinions, for I thought I had clearly expressed them not only in 'Reason and Faith,' but in other writings; it is certain, however, that he has misapprehended them. I am sure he has not wilfully misrepresented them. He says:—

'It is very common to hear or to read the dilemma put before the doubter, that he must accept everything or nothing in Christianity and the Bible.'* Reference then made in general to the 'Greyson Correspondence,' (which he rightly attributes to me, though I had then acknowledged it), but without citing any special letter. I thought, indeed, that in that very publication (Letters cii. ciii.), as well as in 'Reason and Faith' (Appendix No. iii., now incorporated into the body of the Essay), I had taken the very ground which this author supposes me *not* to have taken.

I freely conceded, that in the Scriptures, as we have them, there are many apparent and some real discrepancies,—the last probably due to the inevitable corruptions of time, and the conditions under which all ancient documents are transmitted to us; I further conceded that even if these discrepancies were attributed to some remaining ignorance or error on the part of the sacred writers, such a theory (though I did not embrace it) might be and often was held, with the

* P. 527.

undoubting admission of everything essential or significant in the New Testament; adding that if the theory were applied, as in equity it should be, only to cases of proven contradictions and absolutely irreconcileable discrepancies, these were so few in number or so trivial in character that if the passages involving them were left out of the New Testament they would make 'no appreciable difference to its text.'

It is clear, therefore, that I do not hold that the alternative is 'to receive the whole of the Bible and Christianity, or none of it.' I apprehend that the statement has arisen from misconception of certain expressions to which I still firmly adhere, and which will be found both in the treatise on 'Reason and Faith,' and in the 'Greyson Letters;' namely, that the *à priori* principle on which rationalism often accepts certain facts and doctrines, and rejects others which stand nevertheless on precisely the same evidence; the principle by which it abridges or expands the contents of Revelation, according to its notions of what it ought to be, or must be, or cannot be,—thus giving it (as is notoriously the case) every variety of dimension according to the predisposition or mood of different minds,—is altogether indefensible; and that there is no *logical* resting-place between the entire reception or the entire rejection of whatsoever in the

Scriptures is confirmed by the same evidence. But though I am fully persuaded that there is no *logical* medium here, I am far from saying, even then, that it is all one how far the rationalism, thus exercised, extends: it may leave the essence of the Gospels, as it often has done, altogether untouched. But the *principle*, as it appears to me, for reasons abundantly stated in the Essay itself, is altogether arbitrary; as is seen by the infinitely diversified drafts of Christianity presented by the different schools of rationalism, and which occupy every conceivable position between the limits of orthodoxy and deism; between him who accepts with trivial deductions the entire New Testament, and a Christian after the fashion of Strauss or Renan. What I have said, therefore, is a very different thing from saying that it is of very little consequence how much is accepted if anything at all be rejected, or that everything that is rejected is of equal moment.

It is hard not to believe, for example, that the same general evidence for the credibility of the gospel history, which proves the cardinal fact of Christ's resurrection, will serve also to prove the miracle of the blasting of the barren fig-tree; but if a man who receives the first, reject, on *à priori grounds*, the last, (as some are disposed to do,) I must certainly consider his proceeding arbitrary and his

position illogical; he ought either to accept or reject both. But God forbid that I should think it of equal importance that a man should believe in the one as in the other; the one fact is essential to the Christian faith, the other but an accident of it. It is of great importance, indeed, that a principle false in itself should be exposed, though practically everything may depend upon the manner in which it is applied. All poison should be labelled as such, but it does not follow that it would be as fatal to take a grain as to take an ounce of it.

I may take this opportunity of making a remark or two on some statements which immediately follow the above citation, in which my respected critic argues (I must say rather vaguely) against the employment of what he calls the 'Dilemma' in this great argument. He says:—

'Such an alternative, though dictated by a commendable motive, is likely to prove ineffectual. The dilemma is a form of reasoning which rarely persuades. Its object is rather to silence than to convince. It is more a trick of rhetoric than an argument of logic. It may make a person pause by showing him his apparent position; but the heart, if not the head, can always find means to escape from an alternative which it dislikes. And in this particular case the use of it

involves the risk of overlooking the different degrees of importance which belong to different portions of religion, and the very different degrees of evidence on which different portions of it rest. Though the smallest circumstances in reference to it are of importance, yet it were less vital to doubt the miraculous inspiration of a genealogy, than the authoritative teaching of an Epistle, or to doubt the date of a book than its contents.'

I have just shown, I hope satisfactorily, that I cordially agree in this last sentiment, and that it is only by having overlooked portions of my writings that my respected censor thinks I do not. As regards his remarks on the 'Dilemma,' to which he supposes me peculiarly addicted, he will, I am sure, excuse me, and I think on reflection even agree with me, when I say that there is nothing whatever that he has said here that does not apply equally to any conceivable form whatever, into which arguments on behalf of conclusions *opposed* to our own may be thrown. 'Dilemmas,' no doubt, which shut us up to one of two conclusions, neither of which we are inclined to accept, are very unpleasant things; but not more so than arguments which as cogently shut us up to *one* conclusion equally unpalatable. Nor, I confess, do I understand what is meant when it is said that 'a

dilemma is rather a rhetorical trick than a logical argument.'

Of the dilemma as of all other arguments, I suppose it may be said, and that in the form of the 'dilemma' itself, that they are either sound or unsound: if the former, they are certainly not rhetorical tricks; if the latter, they may with equal justice be called so, whatever their form. Nor is it possible to suppose that the dilemma, consisting as it does merely of a combination of syllogisms, can be more a 'rhetorical trick' than the employment of them separately; and assuredly of it, as of all other arguments, it may be said with great truth that if it be false it may be shown to be so. As to the assertion 'that the heart, if not the head, can always find means to escape from an alternative which it dislikes,' it is lamentably true indeed that the Will is too often a stronger logician than the Reason, and that the heart can put the head into 'dilemmas' of the most excruciating kind. But then it is equally clever in doing this, if the conclusion to which logic would lead us be unacceptable, whether the form into which arguments are thrown be a dilemma, or a syllogism of any mood and figure whatsoever.

It is also doubtless true that opposition will be often provoked in proportion to the very clearness and

sharpness with which unacceptable alternatives are presented (whatever the form of argument); but this is the fault not of him who offers but of him who rejects them. It has been the very fault with which Butler's great work (which abounds in 'dilemmas' of the most uncompromising kind) has been charged. Preposterous complaints are consequently often made in the present day of its alleged sceptical tendency, by writers who cannot refute its arguments and will not accept its conclusions. But whatever may be the inconveniences arising from human infirmity or perverseness, I believe with him that the interests of truth are best secured by stating 'things just as they are.'

The remarks which follow on Strauss's 'Leben Jesu' have been left nearly as they were; for the alterations in his new edition, of which the chief are that 'the author abates his Hegelian mysticism,' (to use an expression of one of his critics,) and no longer absolves the founders of Christianity from all fraudulent design, leave untouched those main peculiarities of the work on which alone my criticisms are founded.

The critique on M. Renan, which was one of the earliest that appeared from the English press, (perhaps the first of at all equal extent,) was originally inserted in the 'London Review' newspaper. It was followed

by many others much more extensive and elaborate; one of which appeared in the Quarterly of the same name. This and several others—amongst which I cannot refrain from mentioning the admirable Discourse of the Rev. John Cairns, D.D., entitled 'False Christs and The True'—will well repay perusal. The last, in brief space indeed, but with uncommon force, clearness, and eloquence, effectually exposes the main paradoxes.

These critiques may be supposed to supersede my own; still, as it points out succinctly what are conceived to be the chief errors of the book, I thought it worth while to republish it. It is a gratifying fact that while the work of M. Rénan achieved such an enormous popularity in France, nearly the entire English press condemned it; and even those public organs that might be supposed to sympathise with the author's general conclusion, showed themselves far too perspicacious to confound his romance with history. If we are to be made infidels at all, it must be by books of a very different stamp.

The remaining essays of the volume require no special introduction; they are reprinted, though not without careful revision, and some additions, from 'Good Words.'

They are chiefly directed against certain specula-

tions—I will not say of modern science, for I believe that the majority of genuine men of science would hesitate to endorse them—but of a certain school of science. Some of these seem to me demonstrably false and pernicious; others, if not demonstrably false, are yet constantly, in defiance of the Baconian philosophy, dogmatically taken for granted by *soi-disant* science, as if they were demonstrably true. Such is that remarkable specimen of 'pure scientific dogmatism' (to use the language of the Edinburgh Reviewer of Renan's 'Life of Jesus'), 'that there neither is nor can be such a thing as a miracle;' and such, again, the monstrous inference from similar data, (namely, the presumed absolute uniformity and immutability of the laws which regulate all phenomena), that, in process of time, Man, by attaining perfect knowledge of the antecedents of events, may become prescient of the future, anticipate history, and, in a sense, become master of the world and lord of his own destiny; nay, as some even say, will become (for He exists not at present) GOD: at all events the only God that is or ever will be! Such speculations I believe to be hardly less injurious to science than to religion—no less inconsistent with the caution and modesty of the true philosopher than with the faith of the Christian.

God, even without working miracles, can easily waken us out of such dreams. He can teach us that we know but little of the deviations by which even the most ordinary phenomena *may* vary from a presumed limit; that phenomena may occur, not only altogether beyond our foresight and control, but as much beyond the ordinary limit within which the like phenomena fall, as if they were veritable miracles. We may have (as last year) almost tropical weather beyond the autumnal equinox, and (as this year) all the winter that we have felt close to the vernal equinox. In one month of the same year, we have had as many heavy tempests, and as many disastrous wrecks, as would ordinarily almost suffice for the twelve; and have probably lost as many cattle, by a mysterious pestilence, in six months as would ordinarily die of disease in as many years. All these events, each anomalous, have been compressed into a few months. As regards social and political changes, we are reminded perpetually, and only too feelingly, that we live but 'from hand to mouth;' and that the profoundest political sagacity cannot tell 'what a day or an hour shall bring forth.' We see indeed that there are some laws, and especially those which man may most perfectly know, but can never hope to control, (as the laws of astronomy for example,) which do not vary,

and which are subjected to exact calculation; but those in which God has ensphered the interests, the hopes, the fears, the joys, the sorrows of us His reasonable, but not very docile creatures, are still administered in a way calculated to teach us, if anything can, a sense of dependence and a feeling of humility.

April 1866.

CONTENTS.

I

Page

REASON AND FAITH: THEIR CLAIMS AND CONFLICTS 1

APPENDIX 137

II.

CRITIQUE ON M. RENAN'S 'VIE DE JÉSUS' . 167

III.

LETTER TO M. D. ON SOME RECENT SPECULATIONS TOUCHING THE SCIENTIFIC APOTHEOSIS OF MAN 251

IV

A 'VISION' ABOUT 'PREVISION;' OR (AS SOCRATES SAYS) 'A DREAM FOR A DREAM 275

Page

V.

REASONS FOR SCEPTICISM AS TO CERTAIN SPECULATIONS OF MODERN SCIENCE: ADDRESSED TO A BELIEVER. IN TWO LETTERS 317

VI.

ANCIENT AND MODERN WISDOM: REFLECTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER OF THE BOOK OF JOB 389

VII.

THOUGHTS SUGGESTED BY THE RECENT FAILURE OF THE ATLANTIC TELEGRAPH EXPEDITION 417

REASON AND FAITH

ANALYSIS OF CONTENTS.

REASON AND FAITH coeval in the nature of man, and of co-ordinate importance in his moral probation, pp. 1—4. Provinces generally assigned to them respectively, pp. 4—7. The union and proportioned action of both, a condition of our moral education; not less as regards the present than as regards a future life, pp. 7—10. Faith necessitated by man's ignorance; illustrations; especially from his ignorance of what he might be expected to know best—himself, pp. 9—14. Our ignorance an important element of our moral training, as well as our knowledge, pp. 14—16. God's methods with us illustrated by the relations between the human parent and his offspring, pp. 17—19. Importance of the subject from two-fold opposite tendencies in all ages, and especially in the present day, pp. 19—25. Futility of the attempt to separate Reason and Faith in matters of religion, whether by restricting our belief solely to what is demonstrable, or by appealing to some imagined infallible human authority, pp. 25—28. The exercise of 'private judgment,' even on the last theory, cannot be evaded; the true alleviations of responsibility, that we are answerable only for our diligent and honest efforts to attain the truth, pp. 28—30. The conditions of an 'Intelligent Faith,' and illustrations from ordinary life, pp. 30—34. Application of the preceding principles to the two great controversies: i. as to the existence of God and His moral government of the world, pp. 35—42; ii. as to the truth of Christianity, pp. 42—54. In both these cases, while the evidence for the conclusions is positive, and such as our faculties can appreciate, the objections are chiefly *à priori*, and presuppose, if they be assumed valid, a knowledge, which

we neither have nor can have, of the Counsels of God. Butler's distinctions, pp. 54—55. The objections to miracles briefly considered; the argument from experience against them condemned by experience, pp. 57—59. Insufficiency of every theory hitherto propounded to explain away the miraculous narratives of the New Testament, on the supposition of their falsehood, pp. 58—60. A special objection to miracles, as incapable of avouching any moral truth, considered. Mutual support which miracle and doctrine give to one another, pp. 60—62, *note*. Differences between the elder Deism and the more advanced theories of modern Rationalism; their resemblance and substantial identity, pp. 64—72. The great problem of *accounting* for the origin and establishment of Christianity on the hypothesis of its falsehood as great as ever; the mythical theory of Strauss as unsatisfactory as the rest, pp. 72—78. Certain current modifications of this advanced Rationalism, pp. 78—82. The morality of the New Testament not a plagiarism from Plato, *note*, pp. 78—83. Objections to the Evidences of Christianity to be carefully discriminated from objections to what it substantiates; the former always to be carefully considered; the latter often worthless; illustrations; Butler's distinction, pp. 83—86. When, and when alone, such objections can be effectual, p. 86. The objections drawn from discrepancies and seeming, or even some *real*, contradictions in the historic portions of the Scripture, not sufficient, pp. 85—86. The apparent discrepancies often *only* apparent; illustrations from profane historians, pp. 86—90. Even supposing some *real* contradictions, there are two theories by which they may be fairly met, pp. 90—96. Precise points of difference between those who hold these theories respectively, pp. 103—105. Both these theories have their obvious limits; the appeal to a 'verifying faculty' or the 'intuitional consciousness' as absolute *judge* of what is to be received or what is to be rejected in a Revelation has no limit. Discordant results of its application. Logical unreasonableness of the *principle*, even when innocuously applied, pp. 105—113. Objections to a 'Book-revelation' answered, pp. 113—115. Cumulative character of the Christian evidences. The gradual abandonment of many of the older objections should teach us that those of Geology, and other modern sciences still in their infancy, must not be assumed to be unanswerable, pp. 115—120. The

disclosure of new objections probably equalises the ordeal of Faith in every age, p. 121. Predictions that Christianity will soon come to an end, effectually rebuked by its history; its own tenacity of life for so many centuries curiously contrasted with the utter discomfiture and oblivion of so many who have prophesied its fall, pp. 121—125. Character and causes of some of the scepticism of the present day, pp. 125—131. Conclusion, pp. 132—136.

Reason and Faith.

'Reason and Faith,' says one of our old divines, with the quaintness characteristic of his day, 'resemble the two sons of the patriarch; Reason is the firstborn, but Faith inherits the blessing.' The image is ingenious, and the antithesis striking; but nevertheless the sentiment is far from just. It is hardly right to represent Faith as *younger* than Reason: the fact undoubtedly being, that human creatures trust and believe at least as soon as they reason or know. The truth is, that both Reason and Faith are coeval in the nature of man, and were designed to dwell in his heart together. They are, and ever were, and, in creatures like ourselves, must be, reciprocally complementary;—neither can exclude the other. It is as impossible to exercise an acceptable faith without having reasons for so exercising it,—that is, without exercising reason while we exercise faith,—as it is to apprehend by our reason, exclusive of faith, all the truths on which we are daily compelled to *act*, no less in relation to this

world than in relation to the next. Neither is it right to represent either of them as failing of the promised heritage, except as both may fail alike, by perversion from their true end, and depravation of their genuine nature; for if to the faith of which the New Testament speaks so much, a peculiar blessing is promised, it is evident, from that same volume, that it is not a 'faith without reason' any more than a 'faith without works,' which is commended by the Author of Christianity: and this is sufficiently proved by the injunction 'to be ready to give a reason for the hope,'—and therefore for the faith,—'which is in us.'

If, therefore, we were to imitate the quaintness of the old divine on whose *dictum* we have been commenting, we should rather compare Reason and Faith to the two trusty spies, 'faithful amongst the faithless,' who confirmed each other's report of 'that good land which flowed with milk and honey,' and to *both* of whom the promise of a rich inheritance there was given,—and, in due time, amply redeemed. Or, rather, if we might be permitted to pursue the same vein a little further, and throw over our shoulders for a moment that mantle of allegory which none but Bunyan could long wear and yet wear gracefully, we should represent Reason and Faith as twin-born;—the one, in form and features, the image of manly beauty,—the other, of feminine grace and gentleness; but to each of whom is allotted a sad privation. The bright eyes

of Reason are full of piercing and restless intelligence, but his ear is closed to sound; Faith has an ear of exquisite delicacy, but on her sightless eye-balls, as she lifts them towards heaven, the sunbeam plays in vain. Hand in hand the brother and sister, in all mutual love, pursue their way, through a world on which, like ours, day breaks and night falls alternate; by day the eyes of Reason are the guide of Faith, and by night the ear of Faith is the guide of Reason. As is wont with those who labour under these privations respectively, Reason is apt to be eager, impetuous, impatient of that instruction which his infirmity will not permit him readily to apprehend; while Faith, gentle and docile, is ever willing to listen to the voice by which alone truth and wisdom can effectually reach her.

It has been shown by Butler in Part I., chs. iv., v., of his great work, that the entire constitution and condition of man, viewed in relation to the present world alone, and consequently all the analogies thence derived, viewing him in relation to a future world, suggest the conclusion that we are here the subjects of a probationary discipline, or in a course of education for another state of existence. But it has not, perhaps, been sufficiently insisted on, that if in the actual course of that education (of which *enlightened obedience* to the 'law of virtue,' as Butler expresses it, or, which is the same thing, to the dictates of supreme wisdom and goodness, is the great end) we give an unchecked

ascendancy to either Reason or Faith, we vitiate the whole process. The chief instrument by which that process is carried on is not Reason alone, or Faith alone, but their well-balanced and reciprocal interaction. It is a system of alternate checks and limitations, in which Reason does not supersede Faith, nor Faith encroach on Reason. But our meaning will be more evident when we have made one or two remarks on what are conceived to be their respective provinces.

In the domain of Reason men generally include, i., what are called 'intuitions,' ii., 'necessary deductions' from these; and iii., deductions from their own direct 'experience;' while in the domain of Faith are ranked all truths and propositions which are received, not *without* reasons indeed, but for reasons underived from *intrinsic* evidence (whether intuitive or deductive, or directly experimental) of the propositions themselves;—for reasons (such as credible testimony, for example) *extrinsic* to the proper meaning and significance of such propositions. Yet such reasons, by accumulation and convergency, may be capable of subduing the force of any difficulties or improbabilities, which cannot be *demonstrated* to involve absolute contradictions.

Of the first kind of truths, or those perceived by intuition, we have examples in what are called 'self-evident axioms,' the immediate result of our 'fundamental laws' or 'conditions' of thought, which no wise man

has ever attempted to *prove.* Of the second we have examples in the entire fabric of mathematical science reared from its basis of axioms and definitions, as well as in every other *necessary* deduction from *admitted* premises. The third virtually includes any conclusion in science based on direct experiment, or observation; though the belief of the truth even of Newton's system of the world, when received as Locke says he received and as the generality of men receive it— *i.e.*, without being able to follow the steps by which the great geometer proves his conclusions—may be represented rather as an act of Faith than an act of Reason; as much so as a belief in the truth of Christianity, founded on its historic and other evidences. The greater part of a man's knowledge, indeed, even of science,—even the greater part of a scientific man's knowledge of science, based as it is on testimony alone (and which so often compels him to renounce to-day what he thought certain yesterday), may be not unjustly considered as more allied to Faith than to Reason. It may be said, perhaps, that the above classification of the truths received by Reason and Faith respectively is arbitrary; that even some of their alleged sources are not always clearly distinguishable; that the evidence of experience may in some sort be reduced to testimony, —that of our senses; and testimony reduced to experience,—that of human veracity under given circumstances; and that both are founded on the observed

uniformity of certain phenomena under similar conditions. We admit the truth of this : and we admit it the more willingly, as it shows that so inextricably intertwined in our nature are the roots both of Reason and Faith that no definitions that can be framed will completely separate them; none that will not involve many phenomena which may be said to fall under the dominion of one as much as of the other. It is sufficient, for our practical purpose, to take without any too subtle refinement, the line of demarcation, which is, perhaps, as obvious as any, and as generally recognised. Most would say that a *generalised* inference, as to the *future*, drawn from direct experiment, was matter of reason rather than of faith, though an act of faith is involved in the process; while there are few who would not call confidence in testimony, where probabilities were nearly balanced, by the name of faith rather than reason, though an act of reason is involved in *that* process. We are much more anxious to show the general involution of Reason and Faith with one another than the points of discrimination between them.

In receiving important truths, then, on the strength of such evidence as that mentioned under the third division, and in holding to them against the perplexities they involve, or, what is still harder, against the prejudices they oppose, every exercise of an intelligent faith will, on analysis, be found to consist : its only

necessary limit will be *proven contradictions* in the propositions submitted to it; for, then, no evidence can justify belief, or even render it possible. But no *other* difficulties, however great, will justify unbelief, where man has all that he can justly demand,—namely, evidence such in its nature as he can deal with, and on which he is accustomed to *act* in his most important affairs in this world (thus admitting its validity), and such in amount as to render it more likely that the doctrines it substantiates are true, than his mere *ignorance* of the mode in which these difficulties can be solved, will justly infer them to be false. 'Probabilities,' says Bishop Butler, 'are to us the very guide of life;' and when the probabilities arise out of evidence on which we are competent to pronounce, and the improbabilities merely from our surmises, where we have no evidence to deal with, and perhaps, from the limitation of our capacities, could not deal with it, if we had it, it is not difficult to see what course practical wisdom tells man he *ought* to pursue; and which he invariably *does* pursue, whatever difficulties beset him,—in all cases except one!

An inviolable union then, a mutual dependence, of Reason and Faith, is the great law of the moral school in which we are being educated. This law is equally, or almost equally, its characteristic, whether we regard man simply in his present condition, or in his present *in relation* to his future condition,—as an inhabitant

only of this world, or as a candidate for another; and to this law, by a series of analogies as striking as any of those which Butler has pointed out (and on which we heartily wish his comprehensive genius had expended a chapter or two), Christianity, in the demands it makes on *both* principles conjointly, is evidently adapted.

Men often speak, indeed, as if the exercise of Faith was excluded from their condition as inhabitants of the present world. But it requires only a very slight consideration to show that the boasted prerogative of Reason is still only that of a limited monarch; and that its attempts to make itself absolute can only end in its own dethronement, and, after successive revolutions, in all the anarchy of absolute pyrrhonism.

For in the intellectual and moral education of man, considered merely as a citizen of the *present* world, we see a constant and inseparable union of the two principles, and provision made for their perpetual exercise. Man cannot advance a step, indeed, without both. We see faith demanded not only amidst the dependence and ignorance in which childhood and youth are passed; not only in the whole process by which we acquire the imperfect knowledge which is to fit us for being men; but to the very last we may be truly said to *believe* far more than we *know*. 'Indeed,' says Butler, 'the unsatisfactory nature of the evidence with which we are obliged to take up in the daily course of

life, is scarce to be expressed.' Nay, in an intelligible sense, even the 'primary truths,' or 'first principles,' or products of the 'fundamental laws of thought,' or 'self-evident maxims,' or 'intuitions,' or by whatever other names philosophers have been pleased to call them,—which, in a special sense, are the very province of *reason*, as contra-distinguished from 'reasoning' or logical deduction,—may be said almost as truly to depend on faith as on reason for their reception.* For the only ground for *believing* them true is that man cannot help so believing them! The same may be said of that great fact, without which the whole world would be at a stand-still—a belief in the uniformity of the phenomena of external nature; that the same sun, for example, which rose yesterday and to-day, will rise again to-morrow. That this cannot be *demonstrated*, is admitted on all hands; and that it is not absolutely proved from *experience* is evident, first, from the fact that experience cannot prove any thing future, and secondly from the fact that the uniformity supposed is only accepted as partially and transiently true; the great bulk of mankind, even while they so confidently act upon that uniformity, rejecting the idea of its being

* Common language seems to indicate this; since we describe that disposition of mind which leads some men to deny the above fundamental truths (or *affect* to deny them), not by a word which indicates the opposite of reason, but the opposite of faith,—by Scepticism, Unbelief, Incredulity.

an *eternal* uniformity. Every theist believes that the present order of things once *began* to be; and every Christian, and most other men, believe that it will also one day cease to be.

But perhaps the most striking example of the helplessness to which man is soon reduced if he relies upon his reason alone, is the spectacle of the issue of his investigations into that which one would imagine he must know most intimately, if he knows anything; and that is, his own nature—his own mind. There is something, to one who reflects long enough upon it, inexpressibly whimsical in the questions which the Mind is for ever putting to itself respecting itself; and to which that same Mind returns from its dark caverns only an echo. We are apt, when we speculate about the mind, to forget for the moment, that it is at once the querist and the oracle; and to regard it as something *out* of itself, like a mineral in the hands of the analytic chemist. We cannot fully enter into the absurdities of its condition, except by remembering that it is our own wise selves who so grotesquely bewilder us. The mind, on such occasions, takes itself (if we may so speak) into its own hands, turns itself about as a savage would a watch, or a monkey a letter; interrogates itself, listens to the echo of its own voice, and is obliged, after all, to lay itself down again with a comically puzzled expression, and acknowledge that of its very self, itself knows little or nothing! 'I am material,' ex-

claims one of these whimsical beings, to whom the 'heaven-descended Know thyself,' would seem to have been ironically addressed. 'I am immaterial,' says another. 'I am both material and immaterial,' exclaims, perhaps, the very same mind at different times. 'Thought itself may be matter modified,' says one, rushing, desperate, into paradox. 'Rather,' says another of the same perplexed species, equally desperate, but rushing to the antipodal paradox, 'matter is thought modified; for what you call matter is but a phenomenon.' 'Both are independent and totally distinct substances, mysteriously, inexplicably conjoined,' says a third: '*how* they are conjoined we know no more than the dead.' 'Not so much perhaps,' says a fourth. 'Do I ever *cease* to think,' says the mind to itself, 'even in sleep? Is not my *essence* thought?' 'You ought to know your own essence best,' all creation will reply. 'I am confident,' says one, 'that I never do cease to think—not even in the soundest sleep.' 'You do, for a long time, every night of your life,' exclaims another, equally confident and equally ignorant. '*Where* do I exist?' it goes on. 'Am I in the brain? Am I in the whole body? Am I anywhere? Am I nowhere?' 'I cannot have any local existence, for I know I am immaterial,' says one. 'I have a local existence, because I am material,' says another. I have a local existence, *though* I am *not* material,' says a third. 'Are my habitual actions voluntary,' it exclaims,

'however rapid they become; though I am unconscious of these volitions when they have attained a certain rapidity; or do I become a mere automaton as respects such actions; and therefore an automaton nine times out of ten, when I act at all?' To this query two opposite answers are given by different minds; and by others, perhaps wiser, none at all; while, often, opposite answers are given by the same mind at different times. In like manner has every action, every operation, every emotion of the mind been made the subject of endless doubt and disputation. Surely if, as Soame Jenyns imagined, the infirmities of man, and even graver evils, are permitted in order to afford amusement to superior intelligencies, and make the angels laugh, few things could afford them better sport than the perplexities of the child of clay engaged in the study of himself. 'Alas!' exclaims at last the baffled spirit of this babe in intellect, as he surveys his broken toys—his shattered theories of metaphysics, 'I know that I *am*; but what I am—where I am—even how I act; not only what is my essence, but what even my mode of operation,—of all this I *know* nothing; and, boast of reason as I may, all that I think on this point is matter of opinion—or is matter of faith!' He resembles, in fact, nothing so much as a kitten first introduced to its own image in a mirror: she runs to the back of it, she leaps over it, she turns and twists, and jumps and frisks, in all directions, in the vain attempt to reach

the fair illusion; and, at length, turns away in weariness from that incomprehensible enigma—the image of herself!

One would imagine, and perhaps not untruly, that the Divine Creator had subjected us to these difficulties —and especially that incomprehensible *tri*lemma, which gives us but the alternatives of believing that there is an union and interaction of two totally distinct substances, or that matter is but thought, or that thought is but matter,—one of which must be true, and all of which approach as near to contradictions as can well be conceived,—for the very purpose of rebuking our presumption, and of teaching us humility; that He had left these obscurities at the very threshold, nay, within the very mansion, of the mind itself, for the express purpose of deterring man from playing the dogmatising fool when he looked abroad. Yet, in spite of his raggedness and poverty at home, no sooner does man look out of his dusky dwelling, than, like Goldsmith's little Beau—who, in his garret up five pair of stairs, boasts of his friendship with lords,—he is apt to assume airs of magnificence, and, glancing at the Infinite through his little eye-glass, to affect an intimate acquaintance with the most aristocratic secrets of the universe!

It is undeniable, then, that the perplexities which uniformly puzzle man in the physical world, and even in the little world of his own mind, when he passes a

certain limit, are just as unmanageable as those found in the moral constitution and government of the universe, or in the disclosures of the volume of Revelation. In both we find abundance of inexplicable difficulties; sometimes arising from our absolute ignorance, and perhaps quite as often from our partial knowledge. These difficulties are probably left on the pages of both volumes for the same or similar reasons; many of them, it may be, because even the commentary of the Creator himself could not render them plain to a finite understanding, though a necessary and salutary exercise of our humility may be involved in their reception; others, if not purely (which seems not probable), yet partly, perhaps principally, for the sake of exercising and training that same humility, as an essential part of the education of a *child*; others, surmountable indeed, in the progress of knowledge and by prolonged effort of the human intellect, may be designed to stimulate that intellect to strenuous action and healthy effort; as well as to supply, in their solution, as time rolls on, an ever-accumulating mass of proofs of the profundity of the wisdom which has so immeasurably anticipated all the wisdom of man; and of the divine origin of both the great books which he is privileged to study as a pupil, and even to illustrate as a commentator,—but the text of which he cannot alter.

But, for submitting to us many profound and insoluble problems, the second of the above reasons—the

training of the intellect and heart of man to submission to the Supreme Intelligence—would alone be sufficient. For if, as is indicated by every thing in human nature, by the constitution of the world as adapted to that nature, and by the representations of Scripture, which are in analogy with both, the present world is but the school of man, in this the childhood of his being, to prepare him for the enjoyment of an immortal manhood in another, every thing may be expected to be subordinated to this great object; and as the *end* of that education can be no other than an *enlightened obedience* to God, the harmonious and concurrent exercise of reason and faith becomes absolutely necessary:—not of reason to the exclusion of faith, for otherwise there would be no adequate test of man's docility and submission; nor of a faith that would assert itself, independently of reason, or in contradiction to it,—for this would not be what God requires, and what alone can quadrate with that intelligent nature He has impressed on His offspring—a *reasonable* obedience. Implicit obedience to the dictates of an all-perfect wisdom, exercised amidst many difficulties and perplexities, as so many tests of sincerity, and yet sustained by evidences amply justifying the conclusions which involve them, would seem to be the great object of man's moral education here, and to vindicate both the partial evidence addressed to his reason, and the abundant difficulties still left to his faith. 'The

evidence of religion,' says Butler, 'is fully sufficient for all the purposes of probation, how far soever it is from being satisfactory as to the purposes of curiosity, or any other: and indeed, it answers the purposes of the former in several respects which it would not do, if it were as over-bearing as is required.' * Or as Pascal beautifully puts it:—'There is light enough for those whose sincere wish is to see,—and darkness enough to confound those of an opposite disposition.'†

* 'Analogy,' part 2, chap viii.

† 'Pensées.' Faugére's edition, tom. ii. p. 151. The views here developed will be found an expansion of some brief hints at the close of the article on Pascal's 'Life and Genius' (Ed. Review, Jan. 1847), to which the want of space then rendered it impossible to do justice. The present opportunity is gladly seized, of pointing the attention of the reader to a tract of Archbishop Whately's, entitled 'The Example of Children as proposed to Christians,' which his Grace, having been struck with a coincidence between some of the thoughts in the tract and those expressed in the 'Review,' was so kind as to transmit to the present writer. Had he seen the tract before, he would have been glad to illustrate and confirm his own views by those of this highly-gifted prelate. He earnestly recommends the tract in question (as well as the whole of the remarkable volume in which it is now incorporated, 'Essays on some of the Peculiarities of the Christian Religion') to the perusal of the reader. To great powers of argument and illustration, and delightful transparency of diction and style, this most instructive writer adds a higher quality still—and a very rare quality it is—an evident and intense honesty of purpose, an absorbing desire to arrive at the *exact truth*, and to state it with perfect fairness and with the just limitations. Without pretending to agree with all that Archbishop Whately has written on the subject of Theology (though he carries his readers with him as frequently as any writer), it may be remarked that in relation to that whole class of subjects, to which the present essay has reference, there is no author of the pre-

As He 'who spake as never man spake' is pleased often to illustrate the relations of the Father of spirits to His intelligent offspring by a reference to the relations of the human parent to *his* children, so the present subject admits of similar illustration. What God does with us in that process of moral education to which we have just adverted, is exactly what every wise parent, though by methods, as we may well judge, proportionably less perfect, endeavours to do with his children. Man, instinctively, or by reflection, adapts himself to the nature of his children; and seeing that only so far as it is justly trained can they be happy, makes the harmonious and concurrent development of their reason and their faith his object; he endeavours to teach them that without which they cannot be happy,—obedience, but a *reasonable* obedience. He gives them, in his general procedure and conduct, sufficient proof of his superior knowledge, superior wisdom, and unchanging love; and, secure in the general effect of this, he leaves them to receive by *faith* many things which he cannot explain to them, even if he would, till they get older; many things which he *can* only partially explain; and many others which

sent day whose contributions are more numerous or more valuable. The highly ingenious ironical *brochure*, entitled 'Historic Doubts relative to Napoleon Buonaparte;' the essays above mentioned, 'On some of the Peculiarities of the Christian Religion;' those 'On some of the Dangers to Christian Faith;' on the 'Errors of Romanism;' and on the 'Kingdom of Christ,' are well worthy of universal perusal.

he might more perfectly explain, but *will* not, partly as a test of their docility, and partly to invite and necessitate the healthy and energetic exercise of their reason in finding out the explanation for themselves. Confiding in the same general effect of his procedure and conduct, he does not hesitate, when the foresight of their ultimate welfare justifies it, to draw still more largely on their faith, in acts of apparent harshness and severity. Time, he knows, will show, though perhaps not till his yearning heart has ceased to beat for their welfare, that all that he did, he did in love. He knows, too, that if his lessons are taken aright, and his children become the good and happy men he wishes them to be, they will say, as they visit his sepulchre, and recall with sorrow the once unappreciated love which animated him,—and perhaps remember with a sorrow deeper still, the transient resentments caused by a salutary severity :—'He was indeed a friend : he corrected us not for his pleasure, but for our profit ; and what we once thought was caprice or passion, we now *know* was—love!'

These analogies afford a true, though most imperfect, representation of the moral discipline to which Supreme Wisdom is subjecting us ; and as men are accustomed to despair of any child with whom paternal experience and authority go for nothing, unless he can fully understand the intrinsic *reasons* for every special act of duty which that experience and authority dic-

tate ; as they are sure that he who has not learned to obey when young will never, when of age, know how to govern either himself or others ; so a similar conduct in any of the children of dust towards the Father of spirits justifies a still more gloomy augury; inasmuch as the difference between the knowledge of man and the ignorance of a child absolutely vanishes, in comparison with that interval which must ever subsist between the knowledge of God and the ignorance of man.

The remarks that have been made are not uncalled for in the present day. For, unfortunately, it is easy just now to detect in many classes of minds a tendency to divorce Reason from Faith, or Faith from Reason ; and to proclaim that 'what God hath joined together' men may, if they please, 'put asunder.' The old conflict between the claims of these two guiding principles of man (in no age wholly suppressed) is visibly renewed in our day ; and the tendency in question is manifested in relation both to Natural Theology and to Revealed Religion. In relation to the latter especially, there are large classes amongst us who press the claims of faith so far, that it would become, if they had their will, an utterly unreasonable guide; some of whom do not scruple to speak contemptuously of the evidences which substantiate Christianity ; to decry and depreciate the study of them ; to pronounce that study unnecessary; and, in many cases, even to insinuate

their insufficiency. They are loud in the mean time in extolling a faith which (as Whately truly observes) is no whit better than the faith of a heathen, who has no other or better reason to offer for his religion than that his father told him it was true! But this plainly is not the intelligent faith, which is everywhere inculcated and applauded in the Scriptures; it is not that faith by which Christianity, appealing in the midst of a multitude of traditional religions to palpable evidence addressed to man's senses and understandings (in a way no other religion ever did), everywhere destroyed the systems for which their votaries could only say that their fathers told them they were true. And yet this blind belief in such tradition, many advocates of Christianity would now enjoin us to imitate! It might have occurred to them, one would think, that, on their principles, Christianity never could have succeeded; for every mind must have been hopelessly pre-occupied against all examination of its novel claims.

It is, indeed, incomparably better that a man should be a sincere Christian even by an utterly unreasoning and passive faith (if that be possible), than no Christian at all; yet at the best, such a man is a possessor of the truth only by accident. He ought to have, and, if he be a sincere disciple of truth, will seek, some more solid grounds for holding it. It is but too obvious, however, that the disposition in many to enjoin

this obsequious mood of mind is prompted by a strong desire to revive the ancient empire of priestcraft and the pretensions of ecclesiastical despotism; to secure re-admission amongst mankind of extravagant and preposterous claims, which their advocates are keenly conscious rest on no solid foundation. They feel that as reason is not *with* them, it must be *against* them; and reason therefore they are determined to exclude.

But the experience of the recent 'developments' of Oxford teaching may serve to show us how infinitely perilous is this course; and how fearfully, both outraged reason and outraged faith will avenge the wrongs done them by their alienation and disjunction. Those results, indeed, we ventured to predict in 1843 before a single leader of the Oxford School had gone over to Rome, and before any tendencies to the opposite extreme of scepticism had manifested themselves. We then affirmed that, on the one hand, those who were contending for the corruptions of the fourth century could not possibly find footing there, but must inevitably seek their ultimate resting-place in Rome—a prediction which has been too frequently fulfilled; and that, on the other, the extravagant pretensions put forth on behalf of an uninquiring faith, and the desperate assertion that the 'evidence for Christianity' was no stronger than that for 'Church Principles,' must, by reaction, lead on to an outbreak of scepticism.

That prophecy, too, has been to the letter accomplished. Our words were,—'We have seen it recently asserted by some of the Oxford school that there is as much reason for rejecting the most essential doctrines of Christianity—nay Christianity itself—as for rejecting their "church principles." That, in short, we have as much reason for being infidels as for rejecting the doctrine of Apostolical succession! What other effect such reasoning can have than that of compelling men to believe that there is nothing between infidelity and popery, and of urging them to make a selection between the two, we know not. . . . Indeed, we fully expect that, as a reaction of the present extravagances, of the revival of obsolete superstition, we shall have ere long to fight over again the battle with a modified form of infidelity, as now with a modified form of popery. Thus, probably, for some time to come, will the human mind continue to oscillate between the extremes of error; but with a diminished arc at each vibration; until truth shall at last prevail, and compel it to repose in the centre.'*

The offensive displays of self-sufficiency and flippancy, of ignorance and presumption, too often found in the productions of the apostles of the modern forms of scepticism, are the natural and instructive, though most painful, result of attempting to give predominance to one principle of our nature, where two or more are

* Oxford Tract School, Ed. Rev., April 1843.

designed reciprocally to guard and check each other; results which must ever follow such attempts. The true development of man—so complexly constituted is his nature—must consist in the harmonious action and proper balance of all the constituents of that nature; the equilibrium for which his soul longs, and for which it is made, must be the result of the combined and proportionate action of forces operating in different directions, and too apt to become exorbitant; of his reason, his faith, his appetites, his affections, his emotions; when these operate each in due proportion, then, and then only, can he be at rest. It may, indeed, transcend any calculus of man to estimate exactly the several elements in this complicated polygon of forces; but we are at least sure that, if any one principle be so developed as to supersede another, no safe equipoise will be attained. We all know, familiarly enough, that this is the case when the affections or the appetites are more powerful than the reason and the conscience, instead of being in subjection to them; but it is not less the case, though the result is not so palpable, when reason and faith either exclude one another, or trench on each other's domain; when one is pampered and the other starved.* Hence the perils

* It has been our lot to meet with disciples of the Tractarian School, who have, by a fatal indulgence of an appetite of belief, brought themselves to receive any mediæval miracle, nay, any ghost story, without examination; saying, with a solemn face, 'It is better to believe than

attendant upon their attempted separation, and the evil results of their actual alienation and hostility. There is no depth of dreary superstition into which men may not sink in the one case, and no altitude of ignorant presumption to which they may not soar in the other. Only by the mutual and alternate action of the different forces that are designed to regulate his nature can man safely navigate his little bark through the narrow straits and amidst the dangerous rocks which impede his course; and if Faith spread not the sail to the breeze, or if Reason desert the helm, we are in equal peril.

If it be said that this is a disconsolate and dreary doctrine; that man seeks and needs a simpler navigation than this troublesome and intricate course, by star and chart, compass and lead line; and that this responsibility, of ever

'Sounding on his dim and perilous way,'

is too grave for so feeble a nature; we answer, that such *is* his actual condition. This is a plain matter of fact which cannot be denied. The various principles of his constitution, and his position in relation to the external world, obviously and absolutely subject him to this very responsibility throughout his whole

to reason.' They at last believe as they *will* to believe; and thus is reason avenged. Reason, similarly indulged, believes that a miracle is even an *impossibility*; and this is the 'Nemesis' of faith.

course in this life. It is never remitted or abated; resolves are necessitated upon imperfect evidence, and action imperatively demanded amidst doubts and difficulties in which reason is not satisfied, and faith is required. To argue, therefore, that God cannot have left man to such uncertainty, is to argue as the pertinacious lawyer did, who, on seeing a man in the stocks, asked him what he was placed there for; and on being told, said, 'They cannot put you there for *that*.' 'But I *am* here,' was the laconic answer.

The analogy, then, of man's whole condition in this life might lead us to expect the same system of procedure throughout; that the evidence which substantiates *religious* truth, and claims *religious* action, would involve this responsibility as well as that which substantiates other kinds of truth, and demands other kinds of action. And after all, what else, in either case, could answer the purpose, *if* (as already said) this world be the school of training of man's moral nature? How else could the discipline of his faculties, the exercise of patience, humility, and fortitude, be secured? How, except amidst a state of things less than certainty —whether under the form of that passive and implicit faith which mimics the possession of absolute certainty, or absolute certainty itself—could man's nature be trained to combined self-reliance and self-distrust, circumspection and resolution, and, above all, to confidence in God? Man cannot be nursed and dandled

into the manhood of his nature, by that unthinking faith which leaves no doubts to be felt, and no objections to be weighed; nor can his docility ever be tested, if he is never called upon to believe any thing which it would not be an absurdity and contradiction to deny! This species of responsibility, then, not only cannot be dispensed with, but is absolutely necessary; and, consequently, however desirable may appear that short path to certainty which a pretended infallibility* promises to man, or that equally short path which leads to the same termination, by telling us that we are to believe nothing which we cannot *demonstrate* to be true, or which *à priori* we may presume to be false, both the one path and the other must lead astray. In the one case, how can the '*reasonable* service' which Scripture demands—the enlightened love and conscientious investigation of *truth*, its reception, not without doubts, but against doubts—how could all this co-exist with a faith which presents the whole sum of religion in the formulary, 'I am to believe without a doubt, and perform without hesitation whatever my

* See Archbishop Whately's admirable discourse, entitled 'The Search after Infallibility,' considered in reference to the Danger of Religious Errors arising within the Church, in the primitive as well as in later Ages.' He here makes excellent use of the fruitful principle of Butler's great work, by showing that, however desirable, *à priori*, an infallible guide would seem to fallible man, God *in fact* has everywhere denied it; and that in denying it in relation to religion, he has acted only as he ordinarily acts.

guide, Parson A., tells me?' Not that even in that case (as has often been shown) would the man be relieved from the necessity of absolutely depending on the dreaded exercise of his private judgment; for (unless each man is to remit his religion wholly to the accident of his birth) he must at least have exercised it once for all, and that on two of the most arduous of all questions: first, *which* of several churches pretending to infallibility, is truly infallible? and next, whether the man may infallibly regard his worthy Parson A. as an infallible expounder of that infallibility? But supposing this stupendous difficulty surmounted, though *then*, it is true, all may seem genuine faith, in reality there is none. Where absolute infallibility is *supposed* to have been attained (even though erroneously), faith in strict propriety—certainly *that* faith which is alone of any value as an instrument of men's moral training, that faith which recognises and intelligently struggles with objections and difficulties—is impossible. Men may be said, in such case, to *know*, but can hardly be said to believe. Before Columbus had seen America, he *believed* in its existence; but when he *had* seen it, his faith became knowledge. Equally impossible, and for the same reason, is any place for faith on the opposite hypothesis; for if man is to believe nothing but what his reason can comprehend, and to act only upon evidence which amounts to certainty, the same paradox is true; for when there

is no reason to doubt, there can be none to believe. Faith ever stands between conflicting probabilities; but her true position is (if we may use the metaphor) the centre of gravity between them, and will be proportionally nearer the greater mass.

In the mean time, that arduous responsibility which attaches to man, and which is obviated neither by an implicit faith in a human infallibility, nor by restricting faith to cases in which reason is synonymous with demonstration, that is, to cases which leave no room for faith, is at once relieved, and effectually relieved, by the maxim—the key-stone of ethical truth—that only voluntary error condemns us;—that all we are really responsible for, is a faithful, honest, patient investigation and weighing of evidence, as far as our abilities and opportunities admit, and a conscientious pursuit of what we honestly deem truth, wherever it may lead us. It is true that a really dispassionate and patient conduct in this respect is what man is too ready to assume he has practised,—and this fallacy cannot be too sedulously guarded against. But that guilty liability to self-deception does not militate against the truth of the representation now made. It is man's *duty* to see that he does not abuse the maxim,—that he does not rashly acquiesce in any conclusion that he *wishes* to be true, or which he is too lazy to examine. If all *possible* diligence and honesty have been exerted in the search, the statement of Chillingworth, bold as it is,

we should not hesitate to adopt, in all the vigour of his own language: 'If in me alone there were a confluence of all the errors which have befallen the sincere professors of Christianity, I should not be so much afraid of them, as to ask God's pardon for them.' He justly regards absolutely involuntary error as blameless.

On the other hand, from the natural relations of truth with the constitution of the mind of man, it may well be affirmed, that (with the exception of a very few abnormal cases of obliquity of intellect, which may safely be left to the merciful interpretations and apologies of Him who created such intellects) those who thus honestly and industriously 'seek' shall 'find,'—not all truth, indeed, but enough for their safety: and that whatever remaining errors may infest and disfigure the truth they have attained, these shall not be imputed to them as sin. According to the image which apostolic eloquence has employed, the baser materials which unavoidable haste, prejudice, and ignorance may have incorporated with the gold of the edifice, must be consumed by that fire which 'will try every man's work of what sort it is,' although he himself will be saved amidst those purifying flames. Like the bark which contained the Apostle and the fortunes of the Gospel, the frail vessel may go to pieces on the rocks, but 'by boat or plank' the voyager himself shall 'get safe to shore.'

It is amply sufficient, then, to lighten our responsibility, that we are answerable only for our honest endeavours to discover and to *live* the truth. Nay, it is to be feared that the responsibility is felt to be irksome, and that man is so prompt by devices of his own to escape from it, not on account of any intrinsic difficulty which remains after the above limitations are admitted, but because he wishes to be exempted from the very necessity of patient and honest investigation. It is not so much the difficulty of *finding* as the trouble of *seeking* the truth, from which he shrinks; a necessity, however, from which, as it is an essential instrument of his moral education and discipline, he can never be released.

If the previous representations be true, the conditions of that intelligent faith which God requires from his intelligent offspring may be fairly inferred to be these: that the evidence for the truths we are to believe shall be, first, such as our faculties are competent to appreciate, and against which, therefore, the mere negative argument, arising from our simple ignorance of the true solution of *à priori* difficulties—difficulties which may perhaps be insoluble because we are finite—can be no reply; and, secondly, such an amount of this evidence as shall fairly overbalance all the objections which we *can* appreciate. This is the condition to which God has obviously subjected us as inhabitants of this present world; and it is on such evidence we

are here perpetually acting. We now believe a thousand things we cannot fully comprehend. We may not see the *intrinsic* evidence of their truth; but their *extrinsic* evidence is sufficient to induce us unhesitatingly to believe, and to act upon them. When that evidence is sufficient in amount, we fairly allow it to overbear all the residual difficulties which encompass the truths to which it is applied, unless, indeed, such difficulties can be *proved* to involve absolute contradictions; for these, of course, no evidence can substantiate. For example, in a multitude of cases, a given combination of merely circumstantial evidence in favour of a certain judicial decision, is familiarly allowed to vanquish all apparent discrepancy on particular and subordinate points; the want of concurrence in the evidence of the witnesses on such points shall not cause a shadow of a doubt as to the conclusion. For we feel that it is far more improbable that the conclusion should be false, than that the difficulty we cannot solve is truly incapable of a solution; and when the evidence reaches this point the objection no longer troubles us.

It is the same with historic investigations. There are ten thousand facts in history which no one doubts, though the narrators of them may materially vary in their version, and though some of the circumstances alleged may be in appearance inexplicable. But the last thing a man would think of doing, in such cases,

would be to neglect the preponderant evidence on account of the residuum of insoluble objections. Man does not, in short, allow his ignorance to control his knowledge, nor the evidence which he has not got to destroy what he has; and the less so, that experience has taught him that in many cases such apparent difficulties have been cleared up, in the course of time and by the progress of knowledge, and proved to be contradictions in appearance only.

It is the same with the conclusions of natural philosophy, when once well proved by experiment, however unaccountable for awhile may be the discrepancy with apparently opposing phenomena. No one disbelieves the Copernican theory now, though thousands did for awhile, on what they believed the irrefragable evidence of their senses. Now, let us only suppose the Copernican theory not to have been discovered by human reason, but made known by revelation, and its reception enjoined on faith, leaving the apparent inconsistency with the evidence of the senses just as it was. Many, no doubt, would have said that no evidence *could* justify them in disbelieving their own eyes, and that such an insoluble objection was sufficient to prove the theory incredible. Yet we now see, in point of fact, that it is not only credible, but true; that the objection was apparent only, and admitted of a complete solution. Thousands accordingly take this for granted, without seeing it; they receive philo-

sophy—this very philosophy—on testimony which apparently contradicts their senses, without even now knowing more of it than if it *were* revealed from heaven. This gives too much reason to suspect, that in other and higher cases the *will* plays a chief part in human scepticism. Nor do we well know what answer those who neglect religion on account of the alleged uncertainty of its evidence, could make, if God were to say to them: 'And yet on *such* evidence, and that far inferior in degree, you have never hesitated to *act*, when your own temporal interests were concerned! You never feared to commit the bark of your worldly fortunes to that fluctuating element. In many cases you believed on the testimony of others what seemed even to contradict your own senses. Why were you so much more scrupulous in relation to ME?'

The above examples are fair illustrations, we presume to think, of the conditions under which we are required to believe the far higher truths, attended no doubt with great difficulties, but which are authenticated in the pages of the two volumes (Nature and Revelation) God has put into our hands to study;—of the conditions to which He subjects us in training us for a future state, and developing in us the twofold perfection involved in the words 'a reasonable faith.' If the considerations just urged were duly borne in mind, we cannot help thinking that they would afford

(where any modesty remained) an answer to most of those forms of unbelief which, from time to time, rise up in the world, and not least in our own day. These are usually founded on one or more supposed insoluble objections arising out of our ignorance. The probability that they *are* incapable of solution is rashly assumed, and made to overbear the far stronger probability arising from the positive and palpable evidence which substantiates the truths involving those difficulties: a course the more unreasonable inasmuch as—first, many such difficulties might be *expected*; and, secondly, in analogous cases, we see that many such difficulties have in time disappeared. On the other hand, it is, no doubt, much more easy to insist on individual objections, which no man can effectually answer, than it is to appreciate at once the *total effect* of many lines of argument and many sources of evidence, all bearing on one point. That difficulty was long ago beautifully stated by Butler,*

* * 'The truth of our religion, like the truth of common matters, is to be judged of by all the evidence taken together. And unless the whole series of things which may be alleged in this argument, and every particular thing in it, can reasonably be supposed to have been by accident (for here the stress of the argument for Christianity lies), then is the truth of it proved. . . . It is obvious how much advantage the nature of this evidence gives to those persons who attack Christianity, especially in conversation. For it is easy to show, in a short and lively manner, that such and such things are liable to objection, but impossible to show, in like manner, the united force of the whole argument in one view.'—*Analogy*, part II. chap. vii.

in a passage well worthy of the reader's perusal. Pascal had observed before him that, not only is it difficult, but impossible, for the human mind to *retain* the impression of a large combination of evidence, even if it could for a moment fully realise the collective effect of the whole. But it cannot do even this, any more than the eye can take in at once, in mass and detail, the objects of an extensive landscape.

Let us now be permitted briefly to apply the preceding principles to two of the most momentous controversies which have exercised the minds of men; that which relates to the existence of God, and that which relates to the truth of Christianity; in both of which, if we mistake not, man's position is precisely similar. He is placed amidst evidence amply sufficient to justify his reasonable faith, and yet beset with difficulties that may well baffle an indocile reason.

Without entering into the many different sources of argument for the existence of a Supreme Intelligence, we shall only refer to that proof to which all theists, savage and civilised, in some form or other, appeal—the traces of an 'eternal power and godhead' in the visible creation. The argument depends on a principle which, whatever may be its metaphysical history or origin, is one which man perpetually recognises, which every act of his own consciousness verifies, which he applies fearlessly to every phenomenon,

known or unknown; and it is this,—That every effect has a cause (though he knows nothing of their connexion), and that effects which bear marks of design have an intelligent cause. This principle is so familiar, that if he were to affect to doubt it, in any practical case in human life, he would only be laughed at as a fool, or pitied as insane. The evidence, then, which substantiates the greatest and first of truths mainly depends on a principle perfectly familiar and perfectly recognised. Man can estimate the *nature* of that evidence; and the *amount* of it, in this instance, he sees to be as vast as the sum of created objects;—nay, far more; for it is as vast as the sum of their relations. So that if (as is apt to be the case) the difficulties of realising this tremendous truth are felt in proportion to the extent of knowledge and the powers of reflection, the evidence man can peffectly appreciate is cumulative in an equal or still higher proportion. Obvious as are the marks of design in each individual object, the sum of proof is not merely the sum of such indications, but that sum indefinitely multiplied by the relations established and preserved amongst all these objects; by the adjustment which harmonises them all into one system, and impresses on all the parts of the universe a palpable order and subordination. While even in a single part of an organised being (as a hand or an eye) the traces of design are not to be mistaken, these are propor-

tionately augmented by similar proofs of contrivance in the many separate organs of one such being—as of an entire animal or vegetable. These are yet to be multiplied by the harmonious relations which are established of mutual proportion and subserviency amongst all the organs, taken together, of any one such being: and as many beings even of that one species or class as there are, so many multiples are there of the same proofs. Similar indications yield similar proofs of design in each individual *part*, and in the *whole* individual, of *all* the individuals of every other class of beings; and this sum of proof is again indefinitely augmented by the proofs of design in the relations of reciprocal dependence, adaptation and subordination, among these *classes* of organised beings; the adjustment of each to every other, and to the whole; of the vegetable to the animal—of the lower animal to the higher. Their numbers, physical force, faculties, functions, duration of life, rates of multiplication and development, sources of subsistence, must all have been determined in exact ratios, and could not transgress certain limits without involving the whole universe in confusion. This amazing sum of proofs of design is yet to be further augmented by the fact that all these classes of organised beings are intimately related to those great elements of the material world in which they live, to which they are adapted, and which are adapted to them; all of

them are subject to the influence of certain mighty and subtle agencies which pervade all nature; agencies which are of such tremendous potency, that any chance error in their proportions of activity would throw every thing into confusion, and which yet are exquisitely balanced and inscrutably harmonised.

The proofs of design arising from the relations thus maintained between all the parts, from the most minute to the most vast, of our own world, are still to be further multiplied by the inconceivably momentous relations subsisting between our own and other planets and their common centre; amidst whose sublime and solemn phenomena science has most clearly discovered that every thing is accurately adjusted by geometrical precision of force and movement; where the *chances* of error are infinite, and the proofs of intelligence, therefore, infinite also. These proofs of design in each fragment of the universe, and in all combined, are continually further multiplied by every fresh discovery, whether in the minute or the vast—by the microscope or the telescope; for every fresh law that is discovered, being in harmony with all that has previously been discovered, not only yields its own proof of design, but infinitely more, by all the relations in which it stands to other laws: it yields, in fact, as many as there are adjustments which have been effected between itself and all besides. Each new proof of design, therefore, is not a solitary fact; but

one which, entering as another element into a most complex machinery, indefinitely multiplies the combinations, in any one of which, chance might have gone astray. From this infinite array of proofs of design, it seems to man's reason, in ordinary moods, stark madness to account for the phenomena of the universe upon any other supposition than that which does account, and can alone account, for them all,—the supposition of a Presiding Intelligence, illimitable alike in Power and in Wisdom.

The only difficulty is justly to appreciate such an argument—to obtain a sufficiently vivid impression of such an accumulation of proofs. This very difficulty, indeed, in some moods, may minister to a temporary doubt. For let us catch man in those moods,—perhaps after long meditation on the metaphysical grounds of human belief,—and with unusual modesty he begins half to doubt whether the child of dust is warranted to conclude *any thing* on a subject which loses itself in the infinite, and which so far transcends all his powers of apprehension! He begins half to doubt, with Hume, whether he can reason analogically from the petty specimens of human ingenuity to phenomena so vast and so unique; a misgiving which is strengthened by reflecting on all those, to him incomprehensible, inferences to which the *admission* of the argument leads him, and which seem almost to involve contradictions. Let him ponder for awhile the difficulties

involved in the notion of Self-subsistence, Eternity, Creation; of Power, Wisdom, and Knowledge, so unlimited as to embrace at once all things, and all their relations, actual and possible,—this 'unlimited' expanding into a dim apprehension of the 'infinite;'—of infinitude of attributes, omnipresent in every point of space, and yet but one and not many infinitudes;—let him once humbly ponder such incomprehensible matters as these, and he will soon feel that though in the argument from design there seemed but one vast scene of triumph for his reason, there is as large a scene of triumph left for his faith. That faith he ordinarily yields; he sees it is justified by those proofs of the great truth which he can appreciate, and which he will not allow to be controlled by the difficulties his conscious feebleness cannot solve; the rather, that he sees that if he does *not* accept that evidence, he has equally incomprehensible difficulties still to encounter, and two or three stark contradictions into the bargain. His reason, therefore, triumphs in the proofs, and his faith triumphs over the difficulties.

It is the same with the doctrine of the divine government of the world. In ordinary states of mind man counts it an absurdity to suppose that the Deity would have created a world to abandon it; that, having employed wisdom and power so vast, in its construction, he would leave it to be the sport of chance.

He feels that the intuitions of right and wrong; the voice of conscience; satisfaction in well-doing; remorse for crime; the present *tendency*, at least, of the laws of the universe—all point to the same conclusion, while their imperfect fulfilment equally points to a future and more accurate adjustment. Yet let the man look exclusively for awhile on the opposite side of the tapestry; let him brood over any of the facts which seem at war with the above conclusion; on some signal triumph of baseness and malignity; on oppressed virtue, on triumphant vice; on 'the wicked spreading himself like a green bay tree;' and especially on the mournful and inscrutable mystery of the 'Origin of Evil,' and he feels that 'clouds and darkness' envelope the administration of the Moral Governor, though doubtless 'justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne.' The evidences above mentioned for this latter conclusion, namely, that there is a Moral Governor of the world, are direct and positive, and such as man can appreciate; the difficulties spring from his limited capacity, or from imperfect glimpses of a very small segment of the universal plan. Nor are those difficulties less upon the opposite hypothesis; and they are there further burdened with two or three flagrant absurdities. The preponderant evidence, far from removing the difficulties, scarcely touches them; yet it is felt to be

sufficient to *justify* faith, though most strenuous faith is required still.

Are the evidences, then, in behalf of Christianity, less of a nature which man can appreciate? or can the difficulties involved in its reception be greater than in the preceding cases? If not, and if, moreover, while the evidence turns as before on principles with which we are familiar, the more formidable objections, as before, are such that we are not competent to decide upon their absolute insolubility, we see how man *ought* to act; that is, not to let his ignorance control his knowledge, but to let his reason accept the proofs which justify his faith in confronting the difficulties that attend them. In none of the preceding cases is he, it appears, warranted to look for the certainty which shall exclude (whatever the triumphs of his reason) a gigantic exercise of his faith. The same may be expected here. Let us briefly consider a few of the evidences. And in order to give the statement a little novelty, we shall indicate the principal topics of evidence, not by enumerating what the advocate of Christianity believes, in believing it to be true, but what the infidel *must* believe in believing it to be false. The *à priori* objection to Miracles we shall briefly touch afterwards.

First, then, in relation to the Miracles of the New Testament, whether they be supposed masterly frauds on men's senses, practised at the time and by the

parties supposed in the records, or fictions (designed or accidental) subsequently fabricated,—but still, in either case, undeniably successful and triumphant beyond all else in the history whether of fraud or fiction, —the infidel must, in the several cases, believe as follows: On the *first* hypothesis, he must believe that a vast number of apparent miracles—involving the most astounding phenomena, such as the instant restoration of the sick, blind, deaf, and lame, and the resurrection of the dead—performed in open day, amidst multitudes of malignant enemies, imposed alike on everybody, and triumphed at once over the strongest prejudices and the deepest enmity;—those who received them and those who rejected them differing only in the certainly not very trifling particular, as to whether they came from heaven or from hell! He must believe that those who were thus successful in this extraordinary conspiracy against men's senses and against common sense, were Galilean Jews, such as all history of the period represents them; ignorant, obscure, illiterate; and, above all, previously bigoted, like all their countrymen, to the very system of which, together with all other religions on the earth, they modestly meditated the abrogation; he must believe that, appealing to these astounding frauds in the face both of Jews and Gentiles, as an open evidence of the truth of a new revelation, and demanding on the strength of them that their own

countrymen should surrender a religion which they acknowledged to be divine, and that all other nations should abandon their scarcely less venerable systems of superstition, they rapidly succeeded in both these very probable adventures; that in a few years, though without arms, power, wealth, or science, they were to an enormous extent victorious over all prejudice, philosophy, and persecution; and in three centuries took nearly undisputed possession, amongst many nations, of the temples of the ejected deities. He must farther believe that the original performers in these prodigious frauds on the world, acted not only without any assignable motive, but against all assignable motive; that they maintained this uniform constancy in unprofitable falsehood, not only together, but separately, in different countries, before different tribunals, under all sorts of examinations and cross-examinations, and in defiance of the gyves, the scourge, the axe, the cross, the stake; that those whom they persuaded to join their enterprise, persisted like themselves in the same obstinate belief of the same 'cunningly devised' frauds; and though they had many accomplices in their singular conspiracy, had the equally singular fortune to free themselves and their coadjutors from all transient weakness towards their cause and treachery towards one another; and, lastly, that these men, having, amidst all their ignorance, originality enough to invent the most pure and sublime

system of morality which the world has ever listened to, had, amidst all their conscious villany, the effrontery to preach it, and, which is more extraordinary, the inconsistency to practise it! *

On the *second* of the above-mentioned hypotheses, that these miracles were either a congeries of deliberately contrived fictions, or fortuitous myths (the slow subsequent deposit of time and accident), the infidel must believe, on the *former* supposition, that, though even transient success in literary forgery, when there are any prejudices to resist, is among the rarest of occurrences; yet that *these* forgeries—the hazardous work of many minds, making the most outrageous pretensions, and necessarily challenging the opposition of Jew and Gentile, were successful, beyond all imagination, over the hearts of mankind; and have continued to impose, by an exquisite appearance of artless truth, and a most elaborate mosaic of feigned events artfully cemented into the ground of true history, on the acutest minds of different races and different ages; while, on the *second* supposition, he must believe that accident and chance have given to these legends their exquisite appearance of historic

* So far as we have any knowledge from history, this must have been the case; and Gibbon fully admits and insists upon it. Indeed, no infidel hypothesis can *afford* to do without the *virtues* of the early Christians in accounting for the success of the *falsehoods* of Christianity. Hard alternatives of a wayward hypothesis!

plausibility, and all the subtle and deeply latent coincidences which abound in them; and on *either* supposition, he must believe (what is far more wonderful) that the world, while the fictions were in course of origination, or as soon as they were published, suffered itself, in the known absence of the facts they asserted, to be befooled *into* the belief of those facts, and *out* of its belief of all that it previously believed; and that it acted thus in spite of persecution from without, as well as prejudice from within; that, strange to say, the strictest historic investigations bring this compilation of fictions or myths—even by the admission of Strauss himself—within fifty or sixty years of the very time in which all the alleged wonders they relate are said to have occurred; wonders which the perverse world knew it had *not* seen, but which it was determined to believe, in the face of evidence, prejudice, and power! In addition to all this the infidel must believe, if he accept the theory of the deliberate invention of these narratives, that the strange compilers of these monstrous fictions deliberately chose them as the vehicle of the purest morality; and, though the most pernicious deceivers of mankind, were yet the most scrupulous preachers of veracity and benevolence! Surely of him, who can receive all these paradoxes—and they form but a small part of what might be mentioned—we may say, 'O infidel, great is thy faith!'

On the supposition that neither of these theories, whether of fraud or fiction, will account, if taken by itself, for the whole of the supernatural narratives which strew the pages of the New Testament, then the objector, who relies on both, must believe, in turn, both sets of the above paradoxes; and then, with still more reason than before, may we exclaim, 'O infidel, great is thy faith!'

Again: he must believe that all those apparent coincidences, which *seem* to connect Prophecy with the *facts* of the origin and history of Christianity,—some, embracing events too vast for hazardous speculation, and others, incidents too minute for it,—are purely fortuitous; that *all* the cases in which the event seems to tally with the prediction, are mere chance coincidences: and he must believe this, amongst other events, of two of the most *unlikely* to which human sagacity was *likely* to pledge itself, and yet which have as undeniably occurred (and *after* the predictions) as they were *à priori* improbable and anomalous in the world's history! The one is, that the Jews should exist as a distinct nation in the very bosom of all other nations, without extinction and without amalgamation, though other nations and even races have so readily melted away under less than half the influences which have been at work upon them;* the other an opposite

* The case of the Gipsies, often alleged as a parallel, is a ludicrous evasion of the argument. These few and scattered vagabonds, whose

paradox,—that a religion, propagated by ignorant, obscure, and penniless vagabonds, should diffuse itself amongst the most diverse nations in spite of all opposition, though it is the rarest of phenomena to find *any* religion which is capable of transcending the limits of race, clime, and the scene of its historic origin; a religion which, if transplanted, will not die; a religion which is more than a local or national growth of superstition. That *such* a religion as Christianity should so easily break these barriers, and though supposed to be cradled in ignorance, fanaticism, and fraud, should, without force of arms, and in the face of persecution, 'ride forth conquering and to conquer' through a long career of victories, defying the power of kings, and emptying the temples of deities,—who, but an *infidel*, has *faith* enough to believe? *

very safety has been obscurity and contempt, have never attracted towards them a thousandth part of the attention, or the hundred thousandth part of the cruelties, which have been directed against the Jews. Had it been otherwise, they would long since have melted away from every country in Europe. We repeat that the existence of a nation for 1800 years in the bosom of all nations, conquered and persecuted, yet never extinguished, and the propagation of a religion amongst *different* races without force, and even against it,—are both, so far as known, paradoxes in history.

* 'They may say,' says Butler, 'that the conformity between the prophecies and the event is by accident; but there are many instances in which such conformity itself cannot be denied.' His whole remarks on the subject, and especially those on the *impression* to be derived from the *multitude* of apparent coincidences, in a long series of prophecies, some vast, some minute; and the improbability of

Once more: if, from the strictly external evidences of this religion, we pass to those supplied by the only records which tell us anything of its nature and origin; the infidel, if he believes these records to be deliberately planned fictions, must believe, amongst other paradoxes, that it is *probable* that a knot of obscure and despised Galilæans—regarded as the scum of a nation which was itself regarded as the scum of all other nations—originated the purest, most elevated, and most *influential* theory of morals the world has ever seen; that the sublimest ethics, expressed with unparalleled simplicity, sprang from ignorance; that precepts enjoining the most refined sanctity were inculcated by imposture; that the first injunctions to universal love broke from the lips of bigotry! He must further believe that these men exemplified the ideal perfection of that beautiful system in the most unique, original, and faultless picture of Virtue ever conceived—a picture which has extorted the admiration even of those who could not believe it to be a *portrait*, and who have yet confessed themselves unable to account for it *except* as such.* He must believe, too, that these ignorant,

their all being accidental, are worthy of his comprehensive genius. It is on the effect of the whole, not on single coincidences, that the argument depends.

* To Christ alone, of all the characters ever portrayed to man, belongs an assemblage of qualities which *equally* attract love and veneration; to him alone belong in perfection those rare traits which the Roman historian, with affectionate flattery, attributes too abso-

yet profoundly fraudulent men, voluntarily aggravated the difficulty of their task, by exhibiting their proposed ideal, not by bare enumeration and description of qualities, but by the most arduous of all methods of representation—that of dramatic action; and, what is more, that they succeeded: that in that representation they undertook to make him act with sublime consistency in scenes of the most extraordinary character and the most touching pathos, and utter moral truth in the most exquisite fictions in which such truth was ever embodied; and that again they succeeded: that so ineffably rich in genius were these obscure wretches that no less than *four* of them were found equal to this intellectual achievement, and though each has told many events, and given many traits which the others have omitted, they all were able to perform their task in the same unique style of invention and the same unearthly tone of art; that one and all, while preserving each his own individuality, has, nevertheless, attained a certain majestic simplicity of style unlike any thing else (not only in any writings of their own nation, *except* their alleged sacred writings, and infinitely superior to any thing which their successors, Jews or Christians, though with these models before

lutely to the merely mortal object of his eulogy: 'Nec illi, quod est rarissimum, aut facilitas auctoritatem, aut severitas amorem, deminuit.' Still more beautiful is the Apostle's description of superiority to all human failings, with ineffable pity for human sorrows: 'He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, though without sin.'

them, could ever attain), but, unlike any acknowledged human writings in the world, and possessing the singular property of being capable of ready transfusion, with hardly the loss of a thought or a grace, into every language spoken by man : he must believe that these fabricators of fiction, in common with the many other contributors to the New Testament, most insanely added to the difficulty of their task by delivering the whole in fragments and in the most various kinds of composition,—in biography, history, travels, and familiar letters; incorporating and interfusing with the whole an amazing number of minute facts, historic allusions, and specific references to persons, places, and dates, as if for the very purpose of supplying posterity with the easy means of detecting their impositions : he must believe that, in spite of their thus encountering what Paley calls the 'danger of scattering names and circumstances in writings where nothing but truth can preserve consistency,' they so happily succeeded, that whole volumes have been employed in pointing out latent and often most recondite congruities; many of them lying so deep, and coming out after such patient comparison of various passages and collateral lights, that it is clear they could never have answered the purposes of fraud, even if the most prodigious genius for fraud had been equal to the fabrication; congruities which, in fact, were never suspected to exist till they were expressly

elicited by the attacks of infidelity, and were evidently never thought of by the writers; he must believe that they were profoundly sagacious enough to construct such a fabric of artful harmonies, and yet such simpletons as, by doing infinitely more than was necessary, to encounter infinite risks of detection, to no purpose; sagacious enough to out-do all that sagacity has ever done (as shown by the effects), and yet not sagacious enough to be merely *specious*: and finally, he must believe that these illiterate impostors had the art, in all their various writings, which evidently proceed from different minds, to preserve the same inimitable marks of reality, truth, and nature in their narrations —the miraculous and the ordinary alike—and to assume and preserve, with infinite ease, amidst their infinite impostures, the tone and air of undissembled earnestness.*

If, on the other hand, he supposes that all the congruities of which we have spoken were the effect, not of fraudulent design, but of happy accident; that, if they be myths, these *myths* arranged themselves in spontaneous harmony, and arrayed themselves with all the appearance of artless truth and historic plausibility —he must believe that chance has done what even the most prodigious powers of invention could not do!

* Was there ever in truth a man who could read the appeals of Paul to his converts, and doubt either that the letters were real, or that the man was in earnest? We scarcely venture to think it.

Once more: he must believe that these same illiterate men, who were capable of so much, were also capable of projecting a system of doctrine singularly remote from all ordinary and previous speculation;—of discerning the necessity of taking under their special patronage those *passive* virtues which man least loved, and found it most difficult to cultivate;—and of exhibiting, in their preference of the spiritual to the ceremonial, and their treatment of many of the most delicate questions of practical ethics and casuistry, a justness and elevation of sentiment as alien as possible from the superstition and fanaticism of their predecessors who had corrupted the Law, and the superstition and fanaticism of their followers who very soon corrupted the Gospel; that they, and they alone, rose above the strong tendencies to the extravagances which had been so conspicuous during the past, and were soon to be as conspicuous in the future.—These and a thousand other paradoxes (arising out of the supposition that Christianity is the fraudulent or fictitious product of such an age, country, and, above all, such men as the problem limits us to) must the infidel receive, and receive all at once; and of him who *can* receive them we can but once more affirm, that, so far from having no 'faith,' he rather possesses the 'faith' which removes 'mountains!'—only it appears that his faith, like that of Rome, is a faith which excludes reason.

On the other hand, to him who accepts Christianity, none of these paradoxes present themselves. On the supposition of the truth of the miracles and the prophecies, he does not wonder at its origin or success: and as little does he wonder at all the literary and intellectual achievements of its early chroniclers, if their elevation of sentiment was from a divine source, and if the artlessness, harmony, and reality of their narratives was the simple effect of the consistency of truth, and of transcription from the life.

Now, on the other hand, what are the chief objections which reconcile the infidel to his enormous burden of paradoxes, and which appear to the Christian far less weighty than the paradoxes themselves? They are, especially with all modern infidelity, chiefly founded on the *à priori* improbability of the doctrines revealed, and of the miracles which sustain them.

Now, here we come to the very distinction on which we have already insisted, and which is so much insisted on by Butler. The evidence which *sustains* Christianity is all such as man is competent to consider, and is precisely of the same nature as that which enters into his every-day calculations of probability; while the objections spring entirely from our ignorance and presumption. They suppose that we know more of the modes of the divine administration —of what God may have permitted, of what is pos-

sible and impossible, of the ultimate issues of an imperfectly developed system, and of its relations to the entire universe,—than we do or can know.*

Of these objections the most widely felt and the most specious, especially in our day, is the assumption that miracles are an *impossibility*;† and yet we will venture to say that there is none more truly unphilosophical. That miracles are *improbable*, viewed in relation to the experience of the individual or of the mass of men, is granted; for if they were not, they would, as Jeremy Taylor says, be no miracles; 'an every-day miracle is none.' But that they are either impossible, or so improbable, that, if they were wrought, no evidence could establish them, is another matter. The first allegation involves a curious limitation of omnipotence; and the second affirms in effect, that, if not impossible, and God were to work a miracle, it would still (man having settled it that a miracle *is* impossible) be our duty to disbelieve him!

We repeat our firm conviction that this *à priori*

* The possible implication of Christianity with distant regions of the universe, and the dim hints which Scripture seems to throw out as to such implication, are beautifully treated in the 4th, 5th, and 6th of Chalmers' 'Astronomical Discourses;' and we need not tell the reader of Butler how strongly he insists upon similar considerations.

† It is, as we shall see, the avowed axiom of Strauss; he virtually acknowledges that, if it be not true, he would not think it worth while to discredit the history of the Evangelists; that is, the history *must* be discredited, because he has resolved that a miracle is an impossibility!

presumption against miracles is but a vulgar illusion of one of Bacon's *idola tribûs.** So far from being disposed to admit the principle that a 'miracle is an impossibility,' we shall venture to utter what may seem to some a paradox, but which we are convinced is a truth, that the prevailing fashion of scepticism in this matter is temporary;—that the time will come when even those who shall object to the *evidence* which sustains the Christian miracles will acknowledge, that philosophy requires them to admit, that men have no ground whatever to dogmatise on the antecedent impossibility of miracles in general; and that not merely because, if theists at all, they will see the absurdity of this assertion, while they admit that the present order of things had *a beginning*; and, if Christians at all, the equal absurdity of the assertion, while they admit that it will have *an end*;—not only because the geologist will have familiarised the world with the idea of successive interventions, and, in fact, distinct creative acts, having all the nature of miracles;—not only, we say, for these special reasons, but for a more general one. The true philosopher will see that, with his limited experience and that of all his contemporaries, he has no right to dogmatise about all that may have been permitted, or will be permitted, in the Divine administration of the universe. He will see that those

* For more extended remarks on this subject see the essay on 'Certain Speculations of Modern Sciences,' in the present volume.

who with one voice denied, about a century ago, the existence of aërolites, and summarily dismissed all the alleged facts as a silly fable, because it contradicted *their* experience,—that those who refused to admit the Copernican theory, because, as they said, it manifestly contradicted *their* experience,—that the schoolboy who refuses to admit the first law of motion, because, as he says, it gives the lie to all *his* experience,—that the Oriental prince (whose scepticism Hume vainly attempts, on his principle, to meet) who denied the possibility of ice, because it contradicted *his* experience, —and, in the same manner, that the men who, with Dr. Strauss, lay down the dictum that a miracle is *impossible*, and a *contradiction*, because it contradicts *their* experience,—have all been alike contravening the first principles of the modest philosophy of Bacon, and have fallen into one of the most ordinary illusions against which he has warned us; namely, that that cannot be true which seems in contradiction to our *own* experience. We confidently predict that the day will come, when the favourite argument of many a so-called philosopher in this matter will be felt to be the philosophy of the vulgar only, and that the illusion is of the very same nature with that which from similar causes so often imposes upon children. Though many may, even then, deny that the testimony which supports the Scripture miracles is equal to the task, they will all alike abandon the axiom which supersedes

the necessity even of examining such evidence, by asserting that no evidence can suffice.

The way in which many dispose of the miracles is essentially undiscriminating and unphilosophic. There have been, they tell us, so many false miracles, superstitious stories of witches, conjurors, ghosts, hobgoblins, of cures by royal touch, and the like,—and *therefore* the Scripture miracles are false! Of course, no one denies that there have been plenty of false miracles. And there have been as many false philosophies and religions. Is there, therefore, none true? The proper business in every such case is to examine fairly the evidence, and not to generalise after this absurd fashion. Otherwise we shall never believe anything; for there is hardly one truth that has not its half score of audacious counterfeits.

Still they are perplexed, like all the rest of the infidel world, *how* to get rid of the miracles—whether on the principle of fraud, or fiction, or illusion. One gentleman thinks there would be 'a great accession to the ranks of reason and common sense by disproving the *reality* of the miracles, without damaging the veracity or honesty of the simple, earnest, and enthusiastic writers by whom they are recorded;' and complains of the coarse and undiscriminating criticism of most of the French and English Deists, who explain the miracles 'on the supposition of the grossest fraud acting on the grossest credulity.' He thinks

that the German Rationalists have depended too much on some 'single hypothesis, which often proves to be *insufficient* to meet the great variety of conditions and circumstances with which the miracles have been handed down to us.' Very true; but what remedy? 'We find one German writer endeavouring to explain away the miracles on the mystical (mythical) theory; and another riding into the arena of controversy on the miserable hobby-horse of "clairvoyance" or "mesmerism;" each of these, and a host of others of the same class, rejecting whatever light is thrown on the question by all the theories together.' This writer therefore proposes, with great and gratuitous liberality, to heap all these theories together, and to take them as they are wanted!

But the phenomena will be found still intractable. The stubborn 'Book,' in its very structure, baffles all such efforts to explain it away; it is willing to be rejected, if it so pleases men, but it guards itself from being thus made a fool of. For who can fail to see that neither all nor any considerable part of the multifarious miracles of the New Testament can be explained by any such gratuitous extension of ingenious fancies; and that if they *could* be so explained, it would be still impossible to exculpate the men who *need* such explanations, from the charge of perpetrating the grossest frauds! Yet our logical ostrich, who can digest all these stones, presumptuously declares a

miracle an *impossibility*, and the very notion of it a *contradiction*.*

While on this subject, we may notice a certain fantastical tone of depreciation of miracles as an evidence of Christianity, which is occasionally adopted even by some who do not deny the possibility or probability, or even the reality, of their occurrence. They affirm them to be of little moment, and represent them—with an exquisite affectation of metaphysical propriety—as totally incapable of convincing men of any *religious truth*; upon the ground that there is no natural relation between any displays of *physical power* and any such truth. Now, without denying that the nature of the doctrine is one criterion,† and must be taken

* This writer denies that men, in Paley's 'single case, in which he tries the general theorem,' *would* believe the miracle; but he finds it convenient to leave out the most significant circumstances on which Paley makes the validity of the testimony to depend, instead of stating them fairly in Paley's own words. Yet that the sceptics (if such there could be) must be the merest fraction of the species, he himself immediately proceeds to prove, by showing (what is undeniably the case) that almost all mankind readily receive alleged miraculous occurrences on far lower evidence than Paley's common sense would require them to demand. Surely this author must be related to the Irishman who placed his ladder against the bough he was cutting off.

† The imputed reasoning in a vicious circle (*i.e.* from the doctrine to the miracle, and from the miracle to the doctrine) is a favourite retort of infidelity. It is, in fact, no more a vicious circle than is involved in the great argument for theism: that is, none at all. In the *latter* case the works of creation prove power and wisdom, and their immensely prevailing characteristics also infer goodness. That

into account in judging of the reality of any alleged miracle in its support, we have just two things to reply to

immense preponderance of proof leads us to extend the inference to the residuum of phenomena which, if they existed *alone*, might imply a malevolent origin, or furnish, owing to our ignorance, no decisive indications at all.

It is not wonderful (supposing, of course, the proper historic evidence of the miracles) that these and the doctrines should mutually support one another. There are doctrines, no doubt, which shine by their own light, and which need no miracles to recommend them; miracles cannot add to their evidence: but there are other doctrines, and indeed, we may say, all which are peculiarly characteristic of Christianity, which are by no means in this predicament; which, like those exceptional phenomena of the outward world just referred to, provoke the doubts, or repel the pride, or baffle the intellect of man. *A priori*, they seem little credible.

But as this is a point of considerable moment in the present day (since it is not uncommon to find even ministers of religion depreciating the miracles as rather supported by the doctrines than as supporting them), it may be as well to say a word or two more on this subject.

It is sometimes urged, then, that the 'miracles are to be believed for the sake of the doctrines, and not the doctrines for the sake of the miracles.' This, if taken generally, is but specious nonsense; but the fallacy is immediately apparent if we proceed to discriminate the different doctrines, and consider them in their *necessarily* different relations to the miraculous facts. There are, no doubt, *some* doctrines, so clear, so self-luminous, that they do not need any miracle to authenticate them. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.' 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.' 'God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth;' such texts as these so commend themselves to reason and conscience that, when once understood, no external corroboration is needed for them. And if these, and such as these, were the sole doctrines of Christianity, it might be intelligibly said that they would throw a stronger light on the miracles than miracles could

this: first, that (as Paley says in relation to the question whether *any* accumulation of testimony can establish a miraculous fact) we are content 'to try the theorem upon a simple case,' and affirm that man is so constituted that, if he himself sees the blind restored to sight and the dead raised, under such circumstances as exclude all doubt of fraud on the part of others and all mistake on his own, he will uniformly associate authority with such displays of superhuman power: which, in fact, he has uniformly done, whenever he has, however falsely, attributed to any agent such

throw on them. But then, so far from leading us to believe the miracles for the sake of the doctrines, the miracles would surely be a greater stumbling-block than ever; they would be mere gratuitous puzzles, wrought for no end or only that they might be believed because backed by truths more evident (as being *self*-evident) than themselves! But when we consider that there are *other* doctrines, which, if the New Testament be true, are of unspeakable importance, but which human reason could never discover for itself; which are of the nature of *facts*, and can be certified only by testimony and other extrinsic evidence,—obviously the view taken of them in the New Testament and by our Lord Himself,—then the maxim that the miracles are to be believed for the sake of the doctrine becomes a simple absurdity. That Jesus Christ was divinely commissioned to reveal the truths He proclaimed, has divine authority to enforce them, and to claim universal and implicit obedience; still more, the facts of His incarnation, atonement, resurrection, and such like,—*these* are truths which can only be believed, because there is sufficient extrinsic ground for believing them;—they are not, like others, self-luminous; and amply vindicate the working of miracles to sustain them. The proper answer, therefore, to the above fallacy,—for it is nothing more,—is to ask, '*Which* doctrines do you mean when you say that the miracles rather derive light from them than shed light upon them?'

power: and, secondly, that the notion in question is in direct contravention of the language and spirit of Christ himself, who *expressly* suspends his claims to men's belief and the authority of his doctrines on the fact of his miracles. 'The *works* that I do in my Father's name they bear witness of me.' 'If ye believe not me, believe *my works*.' 'If I had not come among them, *and done the works which none other man did*, they had not had sin.'

We have enumerated some of the paradoxes which infidelity is required to believe; and the old-fashioned, open, intelligible infidelity of the last century accepted them, and rejected Christianity accordingly. That was a self-consistent, simple, ingenuous thing, compared with the monstrous forms of credulous reason, incredulous faith, metaphysical mysticism, even Christian Pantheism, so many varieties of which have sprung out of the incubation of German rationalism and German philosophy upon the New Testament. The advocates of the more advanced of these systems, after adopting the most formidable of the above paradoxes of infidelity, and (notwithstanding the frequent boast of *originality*) depending mainly on the same objections, and defending them by the very same critical arguments,* delude themselves with the idea that they

* The main *objection*, for example, both with the old and the new forms of infidelity, is that against the *miracles*; the main *arguments*

have purified and embalmed Christianity; not aware that they have first made a mummy of it. They are so greedy of paradox that they, in fact, aspire to be Christians and infidels at the same time.

It is even said by many who thus nominally retain the Bible, though they reject everything in it that is characteristic: 'You mistake us and misapply your argu-

with both, the *antecedent incredibility* of miracles, and *criticism* directed against the credibility of the records which contain them. The principal *differente* is, that modern infidelity shrinks from the coarse imputation of fraud and imposture on the founders of Christianity; and prefers the theory of *illusion* or *myth* to that of deliberate fraud. But with this exception, which touches only the personal character of the founders of Christianity, the case remains the same. The same postulates and the same arguments are made to yield substantially the same conclusions; for, all that is supernatural in Christianity and all credibility in its records equally vanish on either assumption. —Nor is even the modern mode of interpreting many of the miracles (as illusions or legends) unknown to the elder infidelity; only it more consistently felt that neither the one theory nor the other could be trusted to alone. Its motto was—*Velis et remis.* But this is becoming, it would seem, the motto of Strauss too, who, in his last edition, under the pressure of the perplexity of the problem, to the solution of which he feels his mythical theory inadequate, oscillates towards the old Deism; avows that he can by no means absolve the Evangelists of all fraud, as he once did, and attributes an indefinite amount of conscious deception to the founders of Christianity! M. Renan still professes the more courteous view, though in fact alleging quite enough against our Lord and His disciples to stagger any ordinary notions of human integrity. The fact is, that all the sceptical theories of the origin of the Gospels present such invincible difficulties that their authors naturally, and, we may say, necessarily, vacillate, and feel disposed to fly now to one and now to another, according to the pressure of the special difficulties under consideration.

ments; the old controversy with infidelity is dead, and buried; the arguments once used against it are in vain urged against us. We are Christians, we accept the Bible; we simply reject what our "verifying faculty" does not deem credible. Not Christians! Why, we only deny the supernatural; that miracles were ever wrought—that Jesus Christ, therefore, ever rose from the dead, that he died for the sins of men—that he ascended on high—that he will ever come to judgment. It is only such incredible facts as these that we reject; and as to doctrine,—those mystical dogmas, indeed, which Paul and John taught, we deny, of course; we do not deny that they taught them, but simply think they were doting when they did so. But do we deny the *moral* doctrines? Do we not admit that we are "to do to others as we would that others should do to us," as we find *also* stated by heathen moralists? Not Christians! Do you take us for infidels?' 'Why, my good friend,' surely a Christian might well reply to any such, 'What am I to take you for, even on your own showing? What else did any infidel deny than just what *you* deny? and what infidel ever received less? Did Voltaire himself reject anything except all the "miraculous narratives" and all "the mystical doctrines" of the Bible? and did he not receive as many of its moral truths (however little he might practise them) as he found affirmed *also* by heathen moralists? You vehemently contend for the

name of Christian, but I think he was more consistent in laying it aside.'

Proclaiming the miracles of Christianity to be *illusions* of imagination or *mythical* legends, and the inspiration of its records no other or greater than that of Homer's 'Iliad,' or even 'Æsop's Fables;'—rejecting the whole of that supernatural element with which the only records which can tell us anything about the matter are filled—declaring its whole history so uncertain that the ratio of truth to error must be a vanishing fraction;—the advocates of some modern systems of infidelity yet proceed to rant and rave—they are really the only words we know which can express our sense of their absurdity—in a most edifying vein about the divinity of Christianity, and to reveal to us its *true* glories!

'Christ,' says Strauss for example, 'is not an individual, but an *idea*: that is to say, *humanity*. In the *human race* behold the God-made-man! behold the child of the visible virgin and the invisible Father!—that is, of matter and of mind; behold the Saviour, the Redeemer, the Sinless One; behold him who dies, who is raised again, who mounts into the heavens! Believe in *this* Christ! In his death, his resurrection, man is justified before God!'* Well may Müller say, 'And

* Such is Quinet's brief statement of Strauss's mystico-mythical Christianity, founded on the Hegelian philosophy. For a fuller, we dare not say a more intelligible, account of it in Strauss's own words, and the metaphysical mysteries on which it depends, the reader may

these insipidities of Pantheism we are to accept as the genuine interpretation of the evangelic history!' Some, indeed, do not hesitate to say that Strauss himself never believed these absurdities; and they say so in respect for his understanding. They affirm that he said these things merely to cover his infidelity.* They say that one so acute could not really believe such nonsense; or that, if he did, he must be thought acute no more. But if they thus save his understanding, it is at the expense of his honesty. It would prove, not only that Dr. Strauss is critical, and not seldom hypercritical, but also hypocritical. It must be confessed, however, that the flagitious manner in which, at the conclusion of his book, he has discussed the question—whether a man, in his own predicament, may not occupy the place of a Christian preacher and pastor to a congregation of ordinary Christians, taking care not to let them penetrate his disguise,—gives too much reason for the imputation. It is awkward, certainly, when a man will so act as to give the world only the alternative of inferring that he has either lost his wits or lost his integrity.

But whether it be the Rationalism of Paulus, or the

consult Dr. Beard's translation;—pp. 44, 45, of his Essay, entitled 'Strauss, Hegel, and their Opinions.'

* In his recent edition Strauss has avowedly abandoned this most fantastical and absurd theory of Christianity, as interpreted by the philosophy of Hegel. Whether he ever held it may perhaps be doubted.

Rationalism of Strauss—whether that which declares all that is supernatural in Christianity (forming the bulk of its history) to be illusion, or that which declares it myth,—the conclusions can be made out only by a system of interpretation as extravagant as the wildest allegorical dreams of some of the early Fathers;* while the results themselves issue either in those elementary principles of ethics for which there was no need to invoke a revelation at all, or in some mystico-metaphysical philosophy, expressed in language as unintelligible as the veriest gibberish of the Alexandrian Platonists. In fact, by such exegesis and by such philosophy, anything may be made out of anything,

* Of the mode of accounting for the supernatural occurrences in the Scriptures by the illusion produced by mistaken natural phenomena (perhaps the most stupidly jejune of all the theories ever projected by man), Quinet eloquently says, 'the pen which wrote the Provincial Letters would be necessary to lay bare the strange consequences of this theology. According to its conclusion, the tree of good and evil was nothing but a venomous plant, probably a manchineal tree, under which our first parents fell asleep. The shining face of Moses on the heights of Mount Sinai was the natural result of electricity; the vision of Zachariah was effected by the smoke of the chandeliers in the temple; the Magian kings, with their offerings of myrrh, of gold, and of incense, were three wandering merchants, who brought some glittering tinsel to the Child of Bethlehem; the star which went before them, a servant bearing a flambeau; the angels in the scene of the temptation, a caravan traversing the desert, laden with provisions; the two angels in the tomb, clothed in white linen, an illusion caused by a linen garment; the Transfiguration, a storm.' Who would not sooner be an old-fashioned deist than such a doting and maundering rationalist?

and the most fantastical data be compelled to yield equally fantastical conclusions.

But the first and most natural question to ask is obviously this : how can mortal man pretend to extract anything certain, much more *divine*, from records, the great bulk of which the critic has reduced to pure frauds, illusions, or legends,—and the great bulk of the remainder to an absolute uncertainty of how little is true and how much false ?* Surely it would need nothing less than a new revelation to reveal this sweeping restriction of the old; and we should even then be left in an ecstacy of astonishment—first, that the whole significance of it should have been veiled in frauds, illusions, or fictions; secondly, that its true meaning should have been hidden from the world for eighteen hundred years after its divine promulgation; thirdly, that it should be *revealed* at last, either in ethical results which needed no revelation to reveal them, or (as above) in the Egyptian darkness of the allegorico- metaphysico- mystico-logico- transcendental 'formulæ' of a most obscure and contentious philosophy : for of Hegel, in particular, we think it may with truth be said, that the reader is seldom fortunate

* Daub naïvely enough declares that, 'if you except all that relates to angels, demons, and miracles, there is scarcely any mythology in the Gospel.' An exception which reminds one of the Irish prelate, who, on reading 'Gulliver's Travels,' remarked that there were *some* things in that book which he *could not think true.*

enough to *know* that he *knows* his meaning, or even to know that Hegel knew his own.

In fact, whether we regard the original compilers of the evangelic records as inventing all that Paulus or Strauss rejects, or sincerely believing their own delusions; or hold that their statements have been artfully corrupted or unconsciously disguised, till Christ and his Apostles are as effectually transformed and travestied as these modern dreamers are pleased to imagine, with what consistency can we believe anything certain amidst so many acknowledged fictions inseparably incorporated with it? If A has told B truth once, and falsehood fifty times (wittingly or unwittingly makes no difference), what can or ought to induce B to believe that he has any reason to believe A in that only time in which he *does* believe him, unless he knows the same truth by evidence quite independent of A, and for which he is not indebted to him at all? Ought we not at once to acknowledge the futility of attempting to educe any certain historic fact, however meagre, or any doctrine, whether intelligible or obscure, from documents nine-tenths of which, it seems, are to be rejected as a tissue of incredible fictions? Why should we not fairly confess that, for aught we can tell, the *whole* is a fiction? Nor are the meagre fragments of historic fact which these men affect to leave, of sufficient moment to make it other than a matter of the most trivial importance, whether

we regard the whole Bible as absolute fiction or not. Whether an obscure Galilæan teacher, who taught a moral system which may have been as good (we can never *know* from such legendary documents that it was) as that of Confucius or Zoroaster, ever lived or not; and whether we are to add another name to those who have enunciated the elementary truths of ethics, is really of very little moment. Upon their principles we can clearly *know* nothing about him, except that he is the centre of a vast mass of fictions, the invisible nucleus of a huge conglomerate of myths. A thousand times more, therefore, do we respect those, as both more honest and more logical, who, on similar grounds, openly reject Christianity altogether, and who regard the New Testament, and speak of it, exactly as they would of Homer's 'Iliad,' or Virgil's 'Æneid.' Such men, consistently enough, trouble themselves not at all in ascertaining what residuum of truth, historical or ethical, may remain in a book which certainly on this theory gives ten falsehoods for one truth, and welds both together in indistinguishable confusion. Our modern unbelievers, on the other hand, profess the profoundest reverence for Christianity, nay, profess themselves its disciples, and yet come to the same results; with infinite labour, and amidst infinite uncertainties, they extract either elementary moral truth 'as old as the creation,' and as universal as human reason,—or transcendental profundities, which,

after being concealed from the world for eighteen hundred years by a mythical veil, are unhappily lost again the moment they are discovered, in the infinitely deeper darkness of the philosophy of Hegel and Strauss; who in vain endeavour to gasp out, in articulate language, the still latent mystery of the Gospel! Hegel, in his last hours, is *said* to have said,—and if he did not say, he ought to have said,—'Alas! there is but one man in all Germany who understands my doctrine,—and *he* does not understand it!' If, as he says, Hegelianism and Christianity, 'in their highest results' (whatever that may mean), 'are one,' both are, alas! now for ever lost.

That great problem—to account for the origin and establishment of Christianity in the world, with a denial at the same time of its miraculous pretensions—a problem, the fair solution of which is obviously incumbent on infidelity—has necessitated the most gratuitous and even contradictory hypotheses, and may safely be said still to present as hard a knot as ever. The favourite solution, recently, has been that of Strauss—frequently re-modified and re-adjusted indeed by himself—that Christianity is a *myth*, or collection of myths; that is, a conglomerate (as geologists would say) of a very slender portion of facts and truth, with an enormous accretion of undesigned fiction, fable, and superstitions; gradually framed and insensibly

received, like the mythologies of Greece and Rome, or the ancient systems of Hindoo religion. It is true, indeed, that the particular *critical* arguments, the alleged historic discrepancies, on which this author founds his conclusions, are, for the most part, not original; some of them being as old as Celsus and Porphyry, and very many insisted on long ago, either in Germany, or in our own country during the Deistical controversies of the last century. His idea of myths, however, may be supposed original; and he is very welcome to it. For of all the attempted solutions of the great problem, this will be hereafter regarded as, perhaps, the most untenable. Gibbon, in solving the same problem, and starting in fact from the same axioms,—for he too endeavoured to account for the intractable phenomenon from natural causes alone,—assigned, as one cause, the *reputation* of working miracles, the reality of which he denied; but he was far too cautious to decide whether the original founders of Christianity had pretended to work miracles, and had been enabled to cheat the world into the belief of them, or whether the world had been pleased universally to cheat itself into that belief. He was far too wise to tie himself to the proof that in the most enlightened period of the world's history—amidst the strongest contrarieties of national and religious feeling—amidst the bitterest bigotry of millions in behalf of what was old, and the bitterest contempt of millions for all that was new—

amidst the opposing forces of ignorance and prejudice on the one hand and philosophy and scepticism on the other—amidst all the persecutions which attested and proved those hostile feelings on the part of the bulk of mankind—and above all, in the short space of thirty or forty years (which is all that Dr. Strauss allows himself),—Christianity *could* be thus deposited, like the mythologies of Greece or Rome! These, Gibbon well knew, were very gradual and silent formations; originating in the midst of a remote antiquity and an unhistoric age, during the very infancy and barbarism of the races which adopted them, and confined, be it remembered, to those races *alone*; he knew that they display, instead of the exquisite and symmetrical beauty of Christianity, those manifest signs of gradual accretion which were fairly to be expected; in the varieties of the deposited or irrupted substances—in the diffracted appearance of various parts—in the very weather stains, so to speak, which mark the whole mass.

That the prodigious aggregate of miracles which the New Testament asserts would, if fictitious, pass unchallenged, elude all detection, and baffle all scepticism,—collect in the course of a few years energetic and zealous assertors of their historic reality, in the heart of every civilised and almost every barbarous community, and, in the course of three centuries, change the face of the world, and destroy every other

myth which fairly came in contact with them,—who but Strauss can believe? Were there no Strausses in those days? None to question and detect (not even as they saw the delusion going on before their very eyes) the utter baselessness of these legends? Was all the world doting—was even the *persecuting* world asleep? Were all mankind resolved on befooling themselves? Are men wont thus quietly to admit miraculous pretensions, whether they be prejudiced votaries of another system or sceptics as to all? No: whether we consider the age, the country, the men assigned for the origin of these *myths*, we see the futility of the theory. It does not account even for their origination, much less for their success. We see that if any mythology could in such an age have germinated at all, it must have been one very different from Christianity, whether we consider the sort of Messiah the Jews expected, or the hatred of *all* Jewish Messiahs, which the Gentiles could not but have felt. The Christ offered them, so far from being welcome, was to the one a 'stumbling-block' and to the other 'foolishness.'

Let us suppose a parallel *myth*—if so we may abuse the name. Let us suppose the son of some Canadian peasant aspiring to be a moral teacher, but neither working nor *pretending* to work miracles; as much hated by his countrymen as Jesus Christ was hated by his, and both he and his countrymen as much hated by all the civilised world beside, as were Jesus Christ

and the Jews: let us further suppose him forbidding his followers the use of all force in propagating his doctrines, and then let us calculate the probability of an unnoticed and accidental *deposit*, in forty or at most fifty short years, of a prodigious accumulation, about these simple facts, of supernatural but universally accredited fables; these legends escaping detection or suspicion as they accumulated, and suddenly laying hold in a very little time of myriads of votaries in all parts of the world, and in three centuries uprooting and destroying Christianity and all opposing systems! How long will it be before the Mormonites, or any such pretenders, will have similar success? Have there not been a thousand such, and has any one of them had the slightest chance against *systems in possession*, —against the strongly rooted prejudices of ignorance and the Argus-eyed investigations of scepticism? But these prejudices of ignorance and this vigilance of scepticism were both opposed to the pretensions of Christianity; nor can any one example of at all similar and sudden success be alleged, except in the case of Mahomet; and to that the answer is brief. The history of Mahomet is the history of a conqueror— and his logic was the logic of the sword.

In spite of the theory of Strauss, therefore, not less than that of Gibbon, the old and ever recurring difficulty of giving a rational account of the origin and establishment of Christianity still presents itself for solu-

tion to the infidel, as it always has done, and, we venture to say, always will do. It is an insoluble phenomenon, except by the admission of the facts of the New Testament. 'The miracles,' says Butler, 'are a satisfactory account of the events, of which *no other satisfactory* account can be given; nor any account at all, but what is imaginary merely and invented.'

In the meantime, the different theories of unbelief mutually refute one another; and we may plead the authority of one against the authority of another. Those who believe Strauss believe both the theory of imposture and the theory of illusion improbable; and those who believe in the theory of imposture believe the theory of myths improbable. And both parties, we are happy to think, are quite right in the judgment they form of one another.

But what must strike every reflecting person as the most surprising thing in Dr. Strauss is, that with the postulatum with which he sets out, and which he modestly takes for granted as too evident to need proof, he should have thought it worth while to write two bulky volumes of minute criticism to prove that the gospels are not history. A miracle he declares to be an absurdity, a contradiction, an impossibility. If *we* believed this, we should deem a very concise enthymeme (after having *proved* that postulatum though) all that was necessary to construct on the subject. A miracle *cannot* be true; *ergo*, Christianity, which in the

only records by which we know anything about it, avows its absolute dependence upon miracles, *must* be false.*

A modification of one or other of these eccentric forms of unbelieving belief or Christian infidelity (which shall we call it?) has been adopted by many of our own countrymen, who, while still proclaiming, in vague general terms, their reverence for the Bible, and still affirming that they are Christians, yet reject all, or nearly all, that is characteristic of Christianity, or discriminate it from any other religion. It is not, indeed, very easy to say what they positively believe; having, in common with their German prototypes, greater facility in telling us what they do *not* believe, and of wrapping up what they do in a most impregnable mysticism. They certainly reject, however, all that which, when rejected a century ago, left, in the estimate of every one, an infidel *in puris naturalibus*. Like their German acquaintances, they accept the infidel paradoxes—only, like them, they will still be Christians. Some of them believe, with Strauss, that a miracle is an impossibility and contradiction—'incredible *per se*,'—others, that it is incredible, because no evidence can suffice to prove it. As to 'inspiration'—whether of Christ or his apostles—they regard it as, in its nature, the same as that of 'Zoroaster, Confucius, Mahomet, Plato, Luther, and Wickliffe,'—the curiously selected examples given by one of them.

* For some further remarks on Dr. Strauss's work, see Appendix.

'The wisdom of Solomon and the poetry of Isaiah' are declared by the same writer to be the fruit of the *same* inspiration which is *popularly* attributed to Milton or Shakspeare, or even to the homely wisdom of Benjamin Franklin, and that the 'pens of Plato, of Paul, and of Dante, the pencils of Raphael and of Claude, the chisels of Canova and of Chantrey, no less than the voices of Knox, of Wickliffe, and of Luther, are ministering instruments, in different degrees, of the same spirit.' They depreciate the originality of the Christian ethics (which, some of them say, are a gross plagiarism from Plato*) and reject everything that has been

* While it is true that no ancient author has approached, in the expression of ethical truth, so near to the maxims, and sometimes the very expressions of the Gospel, nevertheless, we as strongly affirm, that he who contrasts (whatever the occasional sublimity of expression) the faltering and often sceptical tone of Plato on religious subjects with the uniformity and decision of the Evangelical system,—his dark notions in relation to God (candidly confessed) with the glorious recognition of Him in the Gospel as 'our Father,'—his utterly absurd application of his general principles of morals, in his most Utopian of all Republics, with the broad, plain social ethics of Christianity,—the tone of mournful familiarity (whatever his personal immunity) in which he too often speaks of the saddest pollutions that ever degraded humanity, with the spotless purity of the Christian rule of life,—the hesitating, speculative tone of the Master of the Academy with the decision and majesty of Him who 'spake with authority, and not as the Scribes,' whether Greek or Jewish,—the metaphysical and abstract character of Plato's reasonings, with the severely practical character of Christ's,—the feebleness of the motives supplied by the abstractions of the one, and the intensity of those supplied by the other,—the adaptation of the one to the intelligent only,—and the adaptation of the other to universal humanity,—the very *manner* of

hitherto generally esteemed essential in the system of Christian doctrine. Indeed, by many it is asserted that *no* dogmas are of any importance, and that at all events only what recommends itself to our 'verifying' faculty need to be retained: and this of course varies with the faculty itself. In short, it is hard to say, what is to be retained except those elementary principles of morals, which are easily found elsewhere, and which it seems strange should be thus divinely buried in a book, ninety-nine hundredths of which must be rejected before we can get at them!

Yet it would be quite a mistake, it seems, to suppose that these men are no Christians! They are, on the contrary, among the very few who can tell

Plato, his gorgeous style, at least in those elevated portions of his works in which he reaches the moral sublime, with the still more impressive simplicity of the Great Teacher,—must surely see in the contrast every indication, to say nothing of the utter gratuitousness (historically) of the contrary hypothesis, that the sublime ethics of the Gospel, whether we regard substance, or manner, or tone, or style, are no plagiarism from Plato. As for the man who can hold such a notion, he must certainly be very ignorant either of Plato or of Christ. As the best apology for some offensive utterances on this subject, perhaps it may be charitably hoped that their authors are nearly ignorant of both.—Equally absurd is the attempt to identify the metaphysical dreams of Plato with the doctrinal system of the Gospel, though it is quite true that, long subsequent to Christ, the Platonising Christians tried to accommodate the speculations of the sage they loved to the doctrines of a still greater master. It may be said, perhaps, that a Christian is no competent judge of the superiority of the ethics of Christ to those of Plato. He may content himself with saying that Plato never extorted from his *friends* stronger eulogies than Christ has often extorted from his *enemies*.

us what Christianity really is, and who can separate the falsehoods and the myths which have so long disguised it.*

Now with regard to this whole class of objectors, we must affirm that they are in the very position of the Deists of old, and that the arguments they make use of are identical; that when they can be got to put down, not vague assertions of some novel but profound difficulties, but a precise statement of their objections, we find them either the very same with those which were quite as powerfully urged in the course of the deistical controversies of the last century (the case with far the greater part), or else such as are of similar character, and susceptible of similar answers. We say not that the answers were always satisfactory, nor are now inquiring whether any of

* They even talk spiritually and with an edifying *onction*. This spiritualism indeed, in conformity with the meagreness of the positive part of their creed, is unhappily very vague. It is full of talk about 'a deep insight,' a 'faith' (as one of them says) 'not in dead histories, but in living realities—a revelation to our innermost nature.' 'The true seer,' the same writer says, 'looking deep into causes, carries in his heart the simple wisdom of God. The secret harmonies of nature vibrate on his ear, and her fair proportions reveal themselves to his eye. He has a deep faith in the truth of God.' 'The inspired man is one whose outward life derives all its radiance from the light within him. He walks through stony places by the light of his own soul, and stumbles not. No human motive is present to such a mind in its highest exultation—no love of praise—no desire of fame—no affection, no passion mingles with the divine afflatus, which passes over without ruffling the soul.'

them were so; we merely maintain that the objections in question are not the novelties they affect to be. It is necessary to remember this, in order to obviate an advantage which the very vagueness of much modern opposition to Christianity would obtain, from the notion that some prodigious arguments have been discovered which the intellect of a Pascal or a Butler was not comprehensive enough to anticipate, and which no Clarke or Paley would have been logician enough to refute. We affirm, without hesitation, that when the advocates of this modern form of unbelief descend from their airy elevation, and state their objections in intelligible terms, they are found, for the most, what we have represented them. Indeed, when we read many of the speculations of German infidelity, we seem to be re-perusing many of our own authors of the last century. It is as if our neighbours had imported our manufactures; and, after re-packing them in new forms, and with some additions of their own, had re-shipped and sent them back to us as new commodities. Hardly an instance of discrepancy is mentioned in the 'Wolfenbüttel Fragments,' which will not be found in the pages of our own deists a century ago; and, as already hinted, a vast number of Strauss's elaborate strictures will be found in the same sources. In fact, though far from thinking it to our national credit, none but those who will dive a little deeper than most do into a happily forgotten portion of our literature (which made noise

enough in its day, and created very superfluous terrors for the fate of Christianity) can have any idea of the extent to which the modern forms of unbelief in Germany,—so far as founded on any *positive* grounds, whether of reason or of criticism,—are indebted to our English deists. Tholuck, however, and others of his countrymen, seem thoroughly aware of it.

The objections to the truth of Christianity are directed either against the evidence itself, or that which it substantiates. Against the latter, as Bishop Butler says, unless the objections be truly such as prove contradictions in it of some kind, they are 'perfectly frivolous;' since we cannot be competent judges either as to all which it may be worthy of the Supreme Mind to reveal, or how far a portion of an imperfectly-developed system may harmonise with the whole; and, perhaps on many points, we never can be competent judges, unless we can cease to be finite.

This doctrine, it may be said, must be received with limitations. This is true; and the limitations are obvious enough. Neither Butler nor any one else who has asserted it, can be supposed to have meant that the *whole* of Christianity is to be regarded as a system so far beyond our capacity of judging of it, that we are absolutely incompetent to pronounce on the excellence or wisdom of any part. Often and justly has it been maintained that the exquisite morality of the gospel,—both as to substance and form,—as well as

many of its doctrines, are so adapted to the nature and so approve themselves to the consciousness of man, as to furnish no insignificant indications of a divine origin.

For this reason Dr. Chalmers, who in his earlier work on the 'Evidences' excluded the internal class (from the supposed incompetence of man to form a judgment on the subject), afterwards changed his mind; and, in his later work, gave this class of evidences their just place. All that can be maintained, and all that a reasonable man would venture to maintain, is this:—that though we may see that many parts of Christianity are worthy of God, we are not hastily to conclude that where we do *not* see this, such portions do *not* come from him. This would be false logic, and unjustifiable presumption. To say that man is competent to judge of some parts, and not of the whole, of the system, is no more than saying of some complex machine or some vast fabric, that enough may be known of it to justify the belief that consummate wisdom presided over its construction, though it may be impossible to penetrate the design of every part, or comprehend the bearings of the whole. It is in fact precisely what the theist says, in his argument for the existence of God, founded on the proofs from design in the visible creation. He sees enough, and more than enough, to vindicate his conclusion; but if he were to affirm that he is competent to judge of the

design or coherence of the universal fabric; to pronounce that such and such parts were unworthy of the Deity: that, like Alphonso of Castile, he could, had God been pleased to share his counsels with him, have suggested some auspicious improvements, men would laugh at him, if it were not for pity, or pity him, if it were not for horror. They would say—'He was indeed a "fool" who said that there was no God; but he is a still greater who says that himself is one.' It becomes us, in every such case, to say, as Socrates did of the obscurities in the works of Heraclitus—only with infinitely more reason—'What I understand pleases me well; and I doubt not that what I do *not* understand, would please me as well—if I did but understand it!'

The objections to the *evidence itself* are, as Butler observes, 'well worthy of the fullest attention.' The *à priori* objection to miracles has been already briefly touched. If that objection be valid, it is vain to argue further; but if not, the remaining objections must be powerful enough to neutralise the entire mass of the evidence, and, in fact, to amount to a proof of contradictions,—not on this or that minute point of historic detail,—but on such as shake the foundations of the whole edifice. It will not do to say, 'Here is a minute discrepancy in the history of Matthew or Luke as compared with that of Mark or John;' for there are two methods by which such discrepancies may be

satisfactorily accounted for, without touching the substantial truth of the history or the doctrines of Christianity; and that whether men admit the absolute original indefectibility of the sacred writings or not. For both these classes may say—

I. Similar discrepancies are often found, in other authors, to be apparent, and not real,—founded on our taking for granted that there is no circumstance unmentioned by two writers which, if known, would have been seen to harmonise their statements. This possible reconciliation is admitted readily enough in the case of many seeming discrepancies of *other* historians; but it is a benefit which men are slow to extend to the sacred narratives. There the objector is always apt to take it for granted that the discrepancy is real; though it may be easy to suppose a case (and a *possible* case is quite sufficient for the purpose) which would neutralise the objection. Of this perverseness (we can call it by no other name) the examples are perpetual in the critical tortures to which Strauss has subjected the sacred historians.*—It may be objected, perhaps, that

* The reader may see some striking instances of his disposition gratuitously to take the *worse* sense in Beard's 'Voices of the Church.' Tholuck truly observes, too, in his strictures on Strauss, 'We know how frequently the loss of a few words in *one* ancient author would be sufficient to cast an inexplicable obscurity over another.' The same writer well observes that there never was an historian who, if treated on the principles of criticism which his countryman has applied to the Evangelists, might not be proved a mere mythographer. . . . 'It

the gratuitous supposition of some unmentioned fact—which, if mentioned, would harmonise the apparently counter-statements of two historians—cannot be admitted, and is, in fact, a surrender of the argument.

is plain,' says he, 'that if absolute agreement among historians'—and, still more, absolute *apparent* agreement—'be necessary to assure us that we possess in their writings credible history, we must renounce all pretence to any such possession.' The translations from Quinet, Coquerel, and Tholuck, are all, in different ways, well worth reading. The last truly says, 'Strauss came to the study of the Evangelical history with the foregone conclusion that "miracles are impossible;" and where an investigator brings with him an absolute conviction of the guilt of the accused to the examination of his case, we know how even the most innocent may be implicated and condemned out of his own mouth.' In fact, so strong and various are the proofs of truth and reality in the history of the New Testament, that none would ever have suspected the veracity of the writers, or tried to disprove it, except for the above foregone conclusion—'that miracles are impossible.' We also recommend to the reader an ingenious *brochure* included in the 'Voices of the Church, in reply to Strauss,' constructed on the same principle with Whately's admirable 'Historic Doubts;' namely, 'The Fallacy of the Mythical Theory of Dr. Strauss, illustrated from the history of Martin Luther, and from actual Mohammedan Myths of the Life of Jesus.' *What a subject for the same play of ingenuity would be Dean Swift! The date and place of his birth disputed—whether he was an Englishman or an Irishman—his incomprehensible relations to Stella and Vanessa, utterly incomprehensible on any hypothesis—his alleged seduction of one, of both, of neither—his marriage with Stella affirmed, disputed, and still wholly unsettled,—the numberless other incidents in his life full of contradiction and mystery; and, not least, the eccentricities and inconsistencies of his whole character and conduct! Why, with a thousandth part of Dr. Strauss's assumptions, it would be easy to reduce Swift to as fabulous a personage as his own Lemuel Gulliver. (For further remarks, see Appendix.)

But to say so, is only to betray an utter ignorance of what the argument is. If an objection be founded on the alleged *absolute* contradiction of two statements, it is quite sufficient to show any (not the real, but only a hypothetical and possible) medium of reconciling them, and the objection is, in all fairness, dissolved: and this would be felt by the honest logician, even if we did not know of any such instances in point of fact. We do know, however, of many. Nothing is more common than to find, in the narration of two perfectly honest historians,—referring to the same events from different points of view, or for a different purpose,—the omission of a fact which gives a seeming contrariety to their statements; a contrariety which the mention of the omitted fact by a third writer instantly clears up.* Very forgetful of this have the advocates

* Any *apparent* discrepancy in the Evangelists with either themselves or profane historians is usually sufficient to satisfy Dr. Strauss. He is ever ready to conclude that the discrepancy is *real*, and that the profane historians are right. In adducing some striking instances of the minute accuracy of Luke, only revealed by obscure collateral evidence (historic or numismatic) discovered since, Tholuck remarks, 'What an outcry would have been made, had not the specious appearance of error been thus obviated!' 'Luke calls *Gallio* proconsul of Achaia: we should not have expected it, since, though Achaia was originally a senatorial province, Tiberius had changed it into an imperial one, and the title of its governor, therefore, was procurator; now a passage in Suetonius informs us that Claudius had *restored* the province to the senate.' The same Evangelist calls Sergius Paulus governor of Cyprus; yet we might have expected to find only a prætor, since Cyprus was an *imperial* province. In this case, again, says Tholuck,

of infidelity usually been : nay (as if they would make up in the number of objections what they want in weight), they have frequently availed themselves not only of apparent *contrarieties*, but of mere *incompleteness* in the statements of two different writers, on which to found a charge of contradiction. Thus, if one writer says that a certain person was present at a given time or place, when another says that he and two more were there ; or that one man was cured of blindness, when another says that two were cured,—such a thing is often alleged as a contradiction ; whereas, in truth, it presents not even a difficulty—unless one historian be bound to say not only all that another says, but just so much, and no more. Let such objections be what they will, unless they prove absolute contradictions in the narrative, they are as mere dust in the balance, compared with the stupendous mass and variety of that evidence which confirms the substantial truth of Christianity. And even if they establish *real* contradictions, they still amount, for reasons we

the correctness of the historian has been remarkably attested. Coins, and later still, a passage in Dion Cassius, have been found, giving proof that Augustus restored the province to the senate; and, as if to vindicate the Evangelist, the Roman historian adds, 'Thus proconsuls began to be sent into that island also.' (*Trans. from Tholuck*, pp. 21, 22.) In the same manner coins have been found, proving he is correct in some other once disputed instances. Is it not fair to suppose that many apparent discrepancies of the same order may be eventually removed by similar evidence ?

are about to state, to no more than dust in the balance, unless they establish contradictions not on immaterial but on vital points. The objections must be such as, if proved, leave the whole fabric of evidence in ruins. For,

II. While we are fully disposed to concede to the objector that there are, in the books of Scripture, not only some *apparent* but some *real* discrepancies,—a point which many are reluctant to admit, but which, we think, no candid man will deny,—each of the above classes has still a distinct answer; for, 1. Even the staunchest advocate of the absolute accuracy of the original *autographs* of the Scriptures may justly contend, that the very reasons which necessitate his admission of discrepancies also reduce them to such a limit that they do not affect, in the slightest degree, the substantial credibility of the sacred records; and that, in his judgment, Christians have unwisely damaged their cause, and given a needless advantage to the infidel, by denying that any discrepancies exist, or by endeavouring to prove that they do not. The discrepancies, he will say, are just those which, in the course of the transmission of ancient books, divine or human, through many ages,—their constant transcription by different hands,—their translation into various languages,—may not only be expected to occur, but which *must* occur, unless there be a perpetual series of most minute and ludicrous miracles,—certainly

never promised, and as certainly never performed—to counteract all the effects of negligence and inadvertence, to guide the pen of every transcriber to infallible accuracy, and to prevent his ever deviating into any casual error! Such miraculous intervention, we need not say, has never been pleaded for by any apologist of Christianity; has certainly never been promised; and, if it had,—since we see, *as a matter of fact*, that the promise has never been fulfilled,—the whole of Christianity would fall to the ground. But then, from a large induction, we know that the limits within which discrepancies and errors from *such* causes will occur, must be very moderate; we know, from numberless examples of *other* writings, what the maximum is,—and that it leaves their substantial authenticity untouched and unimpeached. No one supposes the writings of Plato and Cicero, of Thucydides and Tacitus, of Bacon or Shakspeare, fundamentally vitiated by the like discrepancies, errors, and absurdities which time and inadvertence have occasioned.

The corruptions in the Scriptures, from these causes, are likely to be even less than in the case of any other writings; from their very structure,—the varied and reiterated forms in which all the great truths are expressed; from the greater veneration they inspired; the greater care with which they would be transcribed; the greater number of copies which would be

diffused through the world,—and which, though that very circumstance would multiply the number of variations, would also afford, in their collation, the means of reciprocal correction;—a correction which we have seen applied in our day, with admirable success, to so many ancient writers, under a system of canons which have now raised this species of criticism to the rank of an inductive science. This criticism, applied to the Scriptures, has, in many instances, restored the true readings, and dissolved the objections which might have been founded on the uncorrected variations; and, as time rolls on, may lead, by yet fresh discoveries and more comprehensive recensions, to a further clarifying of the stream of Divine truth, till 'the river of the water of life' shall flow nearly in its original limpid purity.

Within such limits as these, the most consistent advocate of Christianity not only *must* admit—not only may *safely* admit—the existence of discrepancies, but may do so even with advantage to his cause. He *must* admit them, since such variations must be the result of the manner in which the records have been transmitted, unless we suppose a supernatural intervention, neither promised by God, nor pleaded for by man: he may safely admit them, because—from a general induction from the history of all literature—we see that, where copies of writings have been sufficiently multiplied, and sufficient motives

for care have existed in the transcription, the limits of error are very narrow, and leave the substantial identity untouched: and he may admit them with advantage; for the admission is a reply to many objections founded on the assumption that he must contend that there are *no* variations, when he need only contend that there are none that can be material.

2. Nor is the other class,—namely, those who do not deem it necessary to affirm in every instance (however unimportant) the absolute indefectibility of the sacred writers in composing the original documents,—without a sufficient defence of the substantial integrity of the books, and therefore of the substantial truth of Christianity. We do not deem it the most probable theory, indeed, nor is it free from liabilities to abuse; but we acknowledge it capable of being held with the entire reception of everything that can be considered *essential* to Christianity.

That theory is, that *such* trivial discrepancies as all, in fact, admit, but which the one party would ascribe to corruptions of the text or omissions of some reconciling facts, may be ascribed to the ignorance or negligence of the authors; that God may have permitted even the sacred writers to fall into minute errors, of no real importance, in their statements of fact. '*À priori*,' such men argue, it 'is not incredible that God may have permitted even those who were the

revealers of His will, on points which were not essential to the integrity of their message, to show, since they were by nature fallible, something less than infallibility; to let the 'treasure,' which was at all events to be contained 'in earthen vessels,' retain some tinct of the receptacle to which it was committed.' If this were so, it would be (it is argued) only in analogy with the general fact, that God does suffer some remaining imperfections to attach to all the forms of good.

We hesitate, indeed, to accept such a theory, because we do not see sufficient proof of its truth, or sufficient necessity for embracing it, in preference to the previous hypothesis. But that it is possible to hold it within limits which leave, not only every essential, but every important, point in the Gospel revelation secure, we have no doubt. If, for example, it were proved that the old cloak which St. Paul says he left at Troas were really left at Miletum, and that his memory had tripped in this trivial matter; or if it were proved that by inadvertence Stephen said Sychem when he really meant another place, it is impossible to deny that, supposing the theory of the intrusion of error into the original documents to be confined to the cases in which *such* discrepancies are charged, the rejection of such passages could not make the smallest appreciable difference to the value of the New Testament; impossible

to deny that if a man who held such a theory issued an 'expurgated edition' of the volume, it would be, to all intents and purposes, the same as the *textus receptus*.

But, then, it is essential that the theory should be applied honestly, and exactly in the same way in which we apply the same principles to any other work.

Now what is our method in ordinary cases? We reject those things, and those alone, which we can demonstrate to be palpable contradictions; contradictions which not only appear to be so, but which no hypothetical or imaginary conditions can account for. We thus eliminate small portions of nearly every historical work, but the substantial facts, all that are of importance, may remain just what they were.

But if such minute errors were made an excuse for rejecting the main facts of the history, 'the substance,' all criticism would cry out against it; it would be felt to be extravagantly absurd. If, for example, it were pretended that the great events of English history were all problematical, because there are, at each epoch, and in every historian, some minute discrepancies which no one can reconcile; if it were affirmed, because the story of Alfred's visit to the camp of the Danes, and that of his 'burnt cakes' were probably myths or mere fictions, that therefore it was doubtful whether he conquered

the Danes at all, and whether the great events of his reign may not be rejected as myths too,—every one would protest against such scepticism. And, similarly, if it were argued, that because the story of Cromwell's intended departure to the American colonies at so critical a period of his fortunes, or that of his being a profligate in youth, are probably mythical, that therefore we cannot be sure he ever became Protector or achieved the other great things which are usually attributed to him, this would be felt by everybody to be an outrage on all historical criticism,—scepticism gone mad.

But there is no danger of any work of ordinary history being so treated. It is only to the Scriptures, only to the historic portions of the Bible, that men apply any such curious canons of judgment; only here, that minute errors, supposed, for argument's sake, to be demonstrated, are adduced for the purpose of diffusing general suspicion over the whole! It is too plain, in fact, that it is for the purpose of getting rid of the supernatural character of the Gospel, and casting doubt on all that forms the *substance* of its history and doctrine, that this microscopic criticism is resorted to; presumed infinitesimal errors, like that of Stephen's substitution of one proper name for another, are diligently sought out and paraded in order that it may be hence inferred that Christ never rose from the dead!

It has been truly said, that had it not been for the purpose of getting rid of the greater facts of the history, these trivial discrepancies would never have enlisted a thousandth part of the eager and vehement critical efforts employed to detect them. But if the theory be *honestly* applied, it will make no essential difference to the text of the New Testament.*

It is freely admitted, then, that it is very possible for a man, who concedes the immense preponderance of the *sum* of the evidence for the truth of Christianity over the *sum* of the objections against it, to take exception to certain minute portions of the sacred records as mistakes or errors of the writers, and yet apply this principle within perfectly innocent limits. It must also be admitted that the principle in question is in fact often applied within such limits; that is, so applied as not to touch anything which a candid mind would contend to be of the essence of Christianity. Such a man may ask, as Paley, for argument's sake, asks, in his chapter on the 'Discrepancies,'—what can it matter to the substantial credibility

* It is curious to hear, as we have sometimes heard, men who hold some modification of this theory, deprecating all appeal to Paley, as *passé* in this whole controversy; 'they are not to be confuted by his old-fashioned arguments!' It would be strange if they could, for their views were Paley's *own*. He was by anticipation 'a broad Churchman,' though not of an extreme type. It makes one almost doubt whether some of those who speak contemptuously of Paley's 'Evidences' have ever read (at least of late) his chapter on the Discrepancies.

of the records, if it were admitted that certain trivial variations in the narrative, or even certain unimportant errors of inference, had arisen, in the one case, from erroneous information, or, in the other, from Jewish modes of thinking and feeling? How is the essence of Christianity affected by it? Is any other history discredited on account of unimportant discrepancies? To many powerful and candid minds this hypothesis is satisfactory, and, as *they* apply it, it is also innocuous.

And if all men would apply the theory with the same judgment, or if it had in itself any obvious limits to control its application, the difference between those who adopt it, and those who plead for the first hypothesis, would not be worth the ammunition expended in the controversy. For the difference resolves itself merely into the *mode* of accounting for certain difficulties and discrepancies which both parties admit do not touch the substantial credibility of the system.

And the precise points of agreement and divergence in the two may be thus stated.

Both parties agree that on fairly weighing the entire evidence, external and internal, it is eminently improbable, or rather impossible, that Christianity should have been either a product of artful fiction, or an accidental deposit of tradition; and if it were either the one or the other, that in such an historic age and amidst so much inevitable prejudice and opposition,

its fictions or its myths should have been received as *facts*;—and that therefore the Gospel is substantially true. But both are also compelled to admit that there are some objections which cannot be solved, and some discrepancies which cannot be reconciled. The advocate of the one hypothesis says, 'I think it more probable that such discrepancies are *either* the result of the inevitable effects of the mode in which ancient books are transmitted, and which no miracles are promised to prevent; *or* that these discrepancies are such in appearance only,—probably arising from the omission of some fact which, if stated, would reconcile them, or from some similar cause. The reasonableness of such an hypothesis I argue, both on the admitted fact that like difficulties from the same causes exist in other writings, which, so far from being harshly assumed to be insoluble contradictions, never affect the credit given to their authors; and that in such writings, as well as in those of the New Testament, *real* solutions of many difficulties have been effected by critical recensions of the text, or by more diligent historic investigation of collateral evidence; while of others it is easy to see that many, perhaps we may say the great majority, are fairly removable by supposed omissions or restrictions of the writers, which, in their silence, are just as allowable as the hypothetical assumption that no such omissions have been made, and no such restrictions

are conceivable. And as we have arrived at many solid solutions of difficulties, so I gather confidence to believe that others will be solved, if we have patience to wait for further light; and that we ought to wait for it without rushing to any dogmatical assertions on the subject. This I think more modest and reverential than hastily talking about the "blunders" of writers, respecting whom we both admit that a divine hand has been employed in moulding them, to at all events an indefinite extent. I further think that this theory of accounting for the difficulties is, *à priori*, more probable than the other: 1. Because, admitting the preponderant evidence for the truth of Christianity, it seems hardly supposable that, when so stupendous an intervention, as is implied in miracles and prophecy, has been employed to authenticate a religious system, that system should be left liable to indeterminate corruption and depravation in the very *act* of propounding it to the world; 2. Because on inspecting the writings themselves, the very fact that such men as their authors have produced what, intellectually, morally, and from historic conditions, it seems impossible that they should ever have produced out of their own heads, indicates that they had undergone a metamorphosis which I cannot resolve into anything but their subjection to divine illumination and superintendence. I see as a matter of fact that these writings have many characteristics, which,

though in part *human*, are also mainly such as man —but especially such men as the problem restricts us to—never could have displayed. As I look at any, even the best, writings of the Fathers,—at any, even the best, of the Apocryphal gospels; at any, even the best, of the remains of the Jewish mind of that day, I see plainly that those who produced them were no more capable of constructing any one of the four Gospels,—still less all the four,—than a savage could have built St. Paul's. I see also that while the New Testament abounds in characteristics which I know not how to ascribe to human nature in any age, far less to the humanity of that age, and least of all to such men as the Jews of that day, it has exercised an influence such as no other documents ever exercised, and repelled an amount of hostile criticism, such as no other documents ever resisted. It does not seem to me therefore reverent, under such circumstances, to adopt such an hypothesis as that of original "blunders," except under such a logical necessity as I cannot yet find. And 3. Because I find in their writings a great number of expressions, which, taken collectively, seem to indicate their claim to divine illumination and superintendence, to a degree which excludes error from the sacred books as they were first given to the world; and that these expressions, to the full extent of their fairly interpreted meaning, are, of course, authenticated by whatever

evidences substantiate any other statement of theirs. Lastly, I have no *criterion* for the application of the principle *you* defend.'

The advocate of the other hypothesis says, 'I believe that, over and above the errors and discrepancies which arise out of inevitable variations of the text, and from our imperfect knowledge of facts which, if known, would demonstrate that many of these errors and discrepancies are apparent only—and many such cases I grant—there are unimportant points on which these writers were allowed to be occasionally misled by inaccurate information, and to fall into error under the influence of remaining ignorance or uncorrected prejudice; but I fully believe that the force of the general evidence demonstrates the substantial credibility of their statements, and the divine origin of every essential and characteristic doctrine of Christianity. As to one of your arguments,—I do *not* see that the writers claim an absolute immunity from error; and, in point of fact, do *you* not admit, that if they did not deliver what was erroneous, it has been made so by the corruptions which the lapse of time and imperfect transmission have occasioned? And do you not also make the ultimate rejection or reception of all such matters depend on the conclusions of enlightened criticism?'

'True,' the other would say; 'but the advantage of the former hypothesis, if logically tenable, is that it can-

not be abused ; it has its own securities against that : we see from the conditions of the transmission, not of the Bible only, but of all literature, that the amount of error is within moderate limits ; that it continually tends to disappear in the course of discussion and investigation ; and lastly, that the evidence by which we are to decide such points—that of history, criticism, philology—is, however difficult, fairly within the grasp of our faculties, and is ultimately subject to them. But the other hypothesis has no such safeguards ; it is indefinitely liable to abuse. If it be admitted that the writers, from whose statements alone we can tell what Christianity is, have in many cases, and to an indeterminate extent, been misled by fallacies in reasoning and inaccuracy of information, what have we to reply to him who will urge the same principle further ; who will say, "I think, *à priori*, this, and this, and this, and this, improbable, fanciful, illogical, false," —and who will proceed to reject what is essential to the Christian system?'

The advocate of the second hypothesis may fairly reply, 'He cannot do this, so long as he has a particle of candour left; if (as I do) he admits the preponderant evidence for the New Testament, and also admits that there are statements which are essential to Christianity, as to any other system, and others which are not, though it may not be always easy to discriminate them. What can it matter to Christianity if

we suppose Matthew or John to have erred in fixing the precise hour of the crucifixion, or whether the supper at Bethany was six or two days before the last Passover? Nor, recollect, do I assume a liberty of rejecting anything except what I can demonstrate to be a contradiction in the letter, whether resulting from error of the writers or not.'

'True,' would be the reply, 'and I fully believe that you have the candour to admit, and the perspicacity to see, the moderate limits within which your hypothesis should be applied; but surely it is better, if evidence will permit it, to have a firmer security against the want of candour or the want of sagacity in others: for this reason I still prefer the former hypothesis:—but as between *us*, and between any who, admitting the general evidence for the truth of Christianity, *honestly* apply themselves to the interpretation of its records, there is no controversy worth waging,—for there will be no substantial difference.'

The advocates of both hypotheses may plead that neither party is called to render an account of the *residuum* of insoluble objections; that they give their assent to conclusions established by a vast preponderance of proof independent of these objections, and are no more bound to give a positive solution of them, than a judge is bound to reconcile a few remaining discrepancies in evidence which is supported by a large excess of probabilities in favour of his decision.

This course of procedure is plainly the dictate of common sense; but is a course better understood, it appears, in philosophy than in theology, and in relation to natural theology than in relation to revealed.

When the natural philosopher finds some phenomena at apparent variance with a general law, founded on a large induction, he does not proceed to abandon his conclusion, but waits with patience for further light; pretty confident that it will come in time, and perfectly confident that if it never comes, he will not be justified on this account in abandoning a conclusion supported by a thousand facts, because he cannot as yet reconcile it with one. In the same manner the theist (convinced, by an immense array of proofs, of the Divine wisdom and benevolence) does not allow his conclusion to be falsified because he stumbles at facts which he cannot reconcile with either. He waits for further light, and exercises the *faith* as well as the *reason* of a philosopher.

'But,' it may be said, 'may not we be permitted, while conceding the miraculous and other evidences of Christianity, and the general authority of the records which contain it, to go a few steps further, and to reject, not only some minute historic statements as due to inaccurate information or a lapse of memory in the writers, but whatsoever seems to our "intuitional consciousness," or our "faculty of verification,"

palpably ill-reasoned, distasteful, improbable, inconsistent, or immoral?' We answer that, for ourselves, we honestly confess we cannot see the logical consistency of such a proceeding;—any more than the reasonableness, after having admitted the preponderant evidence for the great truth of Theism, of excepting some phenomena as apparently at variance with the Divine perfections; and thus virtually adopting a Manichæan hypothesis. We must recollect that we know nothing of Christianity except from its records: and as these, once fairly ascertained to be authentic and genuine, are all, as regards their contents, supported precisely by the same miraculous and other external evidence which sustains any part of them; as they bear upon them precisely the same internal marks of artlessness, truth and sincerity; and, historically and in other respects, are inextricably interwoven with one another; we see not on what principles we can safely reject portions as improbable, distasteful, not quadrating with the dictates of 'reason,' our 'intuitional consciousness,' and what not. This assumed liberty, however, is, as we apprehend, of the very essence of theological Rationalism; and its result may be called the Manichæism of interpretation. So long as the canonicity of any of the records, or any portion of them, or their true interpretation, is in dispute, we may fairly doubt; but that point once decided by honest criticism, to say we receive such and

such portions simply on account of the weight of the general evidence, and yet reject other portions, *though* sustained by the same evidence, because we think there is something in them unreasonable or repugnant to our tastes and opinions, is plainly to accept evidence only where it *pleases* us, and to reject it where it *pleases* us not. The only question fairly at issue must ever be, whether the general evidence for Christianity will overbear the difficulties which we cannot separate from the truths. If it will not, we must reject it wholly; and if it will, we must receive it wholly. There is in our judgment no tenable *logical* position here between absolute scepticism and absolute belief. And this is proved by the infinitely various and Protean character of Rationalism, and the perfectly indeterminate, but always arbitrary, limits it imposes on itself. It exists in all forms and degrees, from a moderation which accepts nearly the entire system of Christianity, and which certainly rejects nothing that can be said to constitute its distinctive truth, to an audacity of unbelief, which, professing still vaguely to reverence Christianity as 'something divine,' sponges out nine-tenths of the whole; or, after reducing the mass of it to a *caput mortuum* of falsehood, fiction, and superstition, retains only a few drops of fact and doctrine,—so few as certainly not to pay for the expenses of the critical distillation.*

* It may be as well to remark, that a disposition may be frequently observed to represent the very general abandonment of the theory of

Nor will the theory of what some call the 'intuitional consciousness' avail us here. It is true, as they assert, that the constitution of human nature is such that, before its actual development, it has a capacity of developing to certain effects only,—just as the flower in the germ, when it expands to the sun, will have certain colours and a certain fragrance, and *no other*;—all which, indeed, though not very new or profound, is very important. But it is not so clear that it will give us any help on the present occasion. We have an original susceptibility of music, of beauty, of religion, it is said. Granted; but as the actual

'verbal inspiration' as a concession to Rationalism; as if it necessarily followed, from admitting that inspiration is not verbal, that therefore an indeterminate portion of the substance or doctrine is purely human. It is plain, however, that this is no necessary consequence: an advocate of plenary inspiration may contend, that though he does not believe the very words of Scripture to have been dictated, yet that the thoughts were either so suggested (if the matter were such as could be known only by revelation), or so controlled (if the matter were such as was previously known), that (excluding errors introduced into the text since) the Scriptures as first composed were—what no book of man ever was, or can be, even in the plainest narrative of the simplest events—a perfectly accurate expression of truth. We enter not here, however, into the question whether such a view of inspiration is better or worse than another. Our simple object is to correct a fallacy which, judging from what we have recently read, has operated rather extensively. Inspiration may be verbal, or the contrary; but, whether one or the other, he who takes the affirmative or negative of that question may still *consistently* contend that it may be plenary. The question of the inspiration of the whole, or the inspiration of a part, is widely different from that as to the suggestion of the words or the suggestion of the thoughts.

development of this susceptibility exhibits all the diversities between Handel's notions of harmony and those of an American Indian—between Raphael's notions of beauty and those of a Hottentot—between St. Paul's notions of a God and those of a New Zealander —it would appear that *the education* of this susceptibility is at least as important as the susceptibility itself, if not more so; for without the susceptibility itself, we should simply have *no* notion of music, beauty, or religion; and between such negation and that notion of all these which New Zealanders and Hottentots possess, not a few of our species would probably prefer the former. It is in vain then to tell us to look into the 'depths of our own nature' (as some vaguely say), and to judge thence what, in a professed revelation from heaven, is suitable to us, or worthy of our acceptance and rejection respectively. This criterion is, as we see by the utterly different judgments formed by different classes of Rationalists as to the *how much* they shall receive of the revelation they may generally admit, a very shifting one—a measure which has no linear unit; it is to employ, as mathematicians say, a variable as if it were a constant quantity; or, rather, it is to attempt to find the value of an unknown quantity by another equally unknown.

It may be contended, then, that this principle (though it may be often, in point of fact, applied within limits which do not intrench on any essential truth) is

in itself *logically* untenable; and that, for many reasons: not merely or principally on account of the paradox it involves,—that God has expressly supplemented human reason by a revelation containing an indeterminate but large portion of falsities, errors, and absurdities, and which we are to commit to our little alembic, and distil as we may; not only on account of that other paradox it imposes, that God has demanded our *faith*, for statements which are to be received only as they appear perfectly comprehensible by our *reason*, or, in other words, only for what it is impossible that we should doubt or deny; not merely because the principle inevitably leaves man to construct the so-called revelation for himself, so that what one man receives as a genuine communication from heaven, another, from having a different development of 'his intuitional consciousness,' rejects as an absurdity too gross for human belief:—Not wholly, we say, nor even principally, for these reasons; but for the still stronger reason, that such a principle involves in its application an egregious trifling with that great complex mass of evidence which, as we have said, applies to the *whole* of Christianity or to *none* of it. As if to baffle the efforts of man consistently to disengage these elements of our belief, the whole are inextricably blended together. The supernatural element, especially, is so diffused, through all the records, that it is more and more felt, at every step, to be impossible to obliterate

it, without obliterating the entire system in which it circulates. The stain, if stain it be, is far too deep for any scouring fluids of Rationalism to wash it out, without destroying the whole texture of our creed; and, in our judgment, the only consistent Rationalism is the Rationalism which rejects it all.

At whatever point the Rationalist may take his stand, we do not think it difficult to prove that his conduct is eminently irrational. If, for example, he be one of those moderate Rationalists who admit (as many do) the miraculous and other evidence of the supernatural origin of the Gospel, and *therefore* also admit such and such doctrines to be true,—what can he reply, if further asked what reason he can have for accepting these truths, and rejecting others which are supported by the very same evidence? How can he be sure that the truths he receives are established by evidence which, to all appearance, equally authenticates the falsehoods he rejects? Surely, as already said, this is to reject and accept evidence as he pleases. If, on the other hand, he says that he receives the miracles only to authenticate what he knows very well without them, and believes true on the information of reason alone, why trouble miracles and revelation at all? Is not this, according to the old proverb, to 'take a hatchet to break an egg?'*

* If such a man says that *he* rejects certain doctrines, not on *à priori* grounds, but because he denies the canonical authority, or

Nor can we disguise from ourselves, indeed, that consistency in the application of the essential principle of Rationalism would compel us to go a few steps further. As Bishop Butler has shown, no greater difficulties (if so great) attach to the page of Revelation than to the volume of Nature itself. What, for example, can be greater than those which are involved in that dread enigma, 'the origin of evil,' compared with which all other enigmas are trifles,—that abyss into which so many of the difficulties of all theology, natural and revealed, at least disembogue themselves? We feel, therefore, that the admission of the principle of Rationalism would ultimately drive us, not only to reject Christianity, but to reject Theism in all its forms, whether Monotheism, or Pantheism, and even positive or dogmatic Atheism itself. Nor could we stop, indeed, till we had arrived at that absolute pyrrhonism which consists, if such a thing be possible, in the negation of all belief,—even to the belief that we do not believe!

But though the objections to Christianity are nume-

the interpretation of portions of the records in which they are found, and is willing to abide by the issue of the evidence on those points—evidence with which the human mind is quite competent to deal,—we answer that he is not the man with whom we are now arguing. The points in dispute will be ultimately determined by the honest use of history, criticism, and philology. But between such a man and one who rejects Christianity altogether, we can imagine no *consistent* position.

rous, and some insoluble, the question always returns, whether they over-balance the mass of the evidence in its favour? Nor is it to be forgotten that they are susceptible of indefinite alleviation as time rolls on; and with a few observations on this point we will close the present discussion.

A refinement of modern philosophy often leads the rationalist to speak depreciatingly, if not contemptuously, of what he calls a *stereotyped* revelation—revelation in a '*book*.' It ties down, he is fond of saying, the spirit to the letter; and limits the 'progress' and 'development' of the human mind in its 'free' pursuit of truth. The answer we should be disposed to make is, first, that if a book *does* contain truth, the sooner that truth is stereotyped the better; secondly, that if such book, like the book of Nature, or (as we deem it) the book of Revelation, really contains truth, its study, so far from being incompatible with the spirit of free inquiry, will invite and repay continual efforts more completely to understand it. Though the great and fundamental truths contained in either volume will be obvious in proportion to their importance and necessity, there is no limit which can be prescribed to the *degree* of accuracy with which the truths they severally contain may be deciphered, stated, adjusted, or even to the period in which fragments of new truth shall continue to be elicited. It is true indeed that theology cannot be said to admit of

unlimited progress, in the same sense as chemistry—which may, for aught we know, treble or quadruple its present accumulations, vast as they are, both in bulk and importance. But even in theology, as deduced from the Scripture, minute fragments of new truth, or more exact adjustments of old truth, may be perpetually expected.—Lastly, we shall reply, that the objection to a revelation's being confined to a '*book*' is singularly inapposite, considering that by the constitution of the world and of human nature, man, without *books*—without the power of recording, transmitting, and perpetuating thought, of rendering it permanent and diffusive,—ever is, ever has been, and ever *must* be, little better than a savage; and therefore, if there was to be a Revelation at all, it might fairly be expected that it would be communicated in this form; thus affording us one more analogy, in addition to the many which Butler has stated, and which may in time be multiplied without end, between 'Revealed Religion and the Constitution and Course of Nature.'

And this leads us to notice a saying of that comprehensive genius, which we do not recollect having seen quoted in connection with recent controversies, but which is well worthy of being borne in mind; as teaching us to beware of hastily assuming that objections to Revelation, whether suggested by the progress of science or by the supposed incongruity of its own

contents, are unanswerable. We are not, he says, rashly to suppose that we have arrived at the true meaning of the *whole* of that book. 'It is not at all incredible that a book, which has been so long in the possession of mankind, should contain many truths as yet undiscerned. For all the same phenomena and the same faculties of investigation, from which such great discoveries in natural knowledge have been made in the present and last age, were equally in the possession of mankind several thousand years before.' These words are worthy of Butler; and, as many illustrations of their truth have been supplied since his day, so many others may fairly be anticipated in the course of time. Several distinct species of argument for the truth of Christianity, from the very structure and contents of the books containing it, have been invented—of which Paley's 'Horæ Paulinæ' is a memorable example. The diligent collation of the text, too, has removed many difficulties; the diligent study of the original languages, of ancient history, manners and customs, has cleared up many more; and by supplying proofs of accuracy, where error or falsehood had been charged has supplied important additions to the evidence which substantiates the truth of Revelation. In reference to the alleged absurdity of many of the Laws of Moses, again, such works as that of Michäelis have disclosed much of that *relative wisdom* which aims not at the abstractedly *best*, but the best which a given condition

of humanity, a given period of the world's history, and a given purpose may dictate. In pondering many of the difficulties in those laws, it is well to remember the answer of Solon to the question, whether he had given the Athenians the *best* laws; he said, No: but that he had given them the best of which they were capable: or the judgment of the illustrious Montesquieu, who remarks, 'When Divine Wisdom said to the Jews, "I have given you precepts which are not good," this signifies that they had only a *relative* goodness; and this is the sponge which wipes out all the difficulties which are to be found in the Laws of Moses;' a saying which, if too strong, is eminently applicable, and will appear the deeper the more deeply it is revolved. Only those legislative pedants will refuse weight to it, who would venturously propose to give New Zealanders and Hottentots, in the starkness of their ignorance, the complex forms of the British constitution.

In like manner have many of the old objections of our deistical writers ceased to be heard in our day, unless it be from the lips of the veriest sciolism; the objections, for instance, of that truly pedantic philosophy which once argued that ethical and religious truth is not given in the Scripture in a *system* such as a schoolman might have digested it into; as if the brief iteration and varied illustration of pregnant truth, intermingled with narrative, parable, and example, were not

infinitely better adapted to the condition of the human intellect in general! For similar reasons, the old objection, that statements of Christian morality are given without the requisite limitations, and cannot be literally acted upon, has been long since abandoned as an absurdity. It is granted that a hundred folios could not contain the hundredth part of all the limitations of human actions, and all the possible cases of a contentious casuistry; and it is *also* granted that human nature is not so inept as to be incapable of interpreting and limiting for itself such rules as 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.'

Not less strikingly have many of the objections, suggested at different periods by the progress of science, been dissolved; and, amongst the rest, those alleged from the remote historic antiquity of certain nations; objections on which infidels like Volney and Voltaire, once so confidently relied. And it is worthy of remark, that some of the old objections of philosophers have disappeared by the aid of that very science—geology—which has led, as every new branch of science probably will, to new ones. Geology, indeed, in our judgment, has already done at least as much to remove difficulties as to occasion them; and it is not illogical or unfair to surmise that, if we will only have *patience*, its own difficulties, as those of so many other branches of science, will be eventually solved. One thing is clear,—that, if the Bible be true and geology be true,

that cannot be geologically true which is scripturally false, or *vice versâ*; and we may therefore laugh at the polite compromise which is sometimes affected by learned professors of theology and geology respectively; who are apt, in extravagant complaisance to one another, to express themselves not simply to the effect that truth may be established by different species of evidence, but as if different species of evidence could establish *contrary* truths! All that is demanded of either—all that is needed—is, that they refrain from a too hasty conclusion of absolute contradiction between their respective sciences, and retain a quiet remembrance of the imperfection of our present knowledge both of geology and, as Butler says, of the Bible. The recent interpretation of the commencement of Genesis —by which the first verse is simply supposed to affirm the original creation of all things, while the second immediately refers to the commencement of the human economy—was first suggested by geology, though suspected and indeed adopted by some of the early Fathers. On this interpretation, those prodigious cycles which geology demands, are—not denied—but simply passed by, with a silence worthy of a *true* revelation, which does not pretend to gratify our curiosity as to the pre-adamitic condition of our globe any more than our curiosity as to the history of other worlds. But though at first sight this interpretation appeared to many, from old association, inadmissible, it is now felt

by multitudes to be the more *reasonable* interpretation, —the second verse certainly more naturally suggesting previous revolutions in the history of the earth than its then instant creation : and though we frankly concede that we have not *yet* seen any account of the whole first chapter of Genesis which quadrates with the doctrines of geology, it does not become us hastily to conclude that there can be none. If a further adjustment of those doctrines, and a more diligent investigation of the Scripture, together, should hereafter *suggest* any *possible* harmony,—though not the *true* one, but one ever so gratuitously assumed,—it will be sufficient to neutralise the objection. This, it will be observed, is in accordance with what has been already shown,— that wherever an objection is founded on an apparent contradiction between two statements, it is sufficient to show any *possible* way in which the statements may be reconciled, whether the true one or not. The objection, in that case, to the supposition that the facts are gratuitously assumed, though often urged, is, in reality, nothing to the purpose.* If ever it should be shown, for example, that supposing as many geological eras as the philosopher requires, to have passed in the

* Some admirable remarks, in relation to the answers we are bound to give to objections to revealed religion, have been made by Leibnitz (in reply to Bayle) in the little tract prefixed to his Theodicée entitled 'De la Conformité de la Foi avec la Raison.' He there shows that the utmost that can fairly be asked is, to prove that the affirmed truths involve no necessary contradiction.

chasm between the first verse, which asserts the original dependence of all things on the fiat of the Creator, and the second, which is supposed to commence the human era, any *imaginable* condition of our system—at the close, so to speak, of a given geological period—would harmonise with a fair interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis, the objection will be neutralised.

We have little doubt that the ultimately converging, though, it may be, transiently discrepant conclusions of the sciences of philology, ethnology, and geology (in all of which we may rest assured great discoveries are yet to be made, nay, all which are as yet in their infancy) will tend to harmonise with the ultimate results of a more thorough study of the records of the race as contained in the book of Revelation. But in all such matters, what we plead for is, simply—*patience*; we wish not to dogmatise; all we ask is, a philosophic abstinence from dogmatism. In relation to many difficulties, what is now a reasonable exercise of faith may one day be rewarded by a knowledge which on those particular points may terminate it. In such ways, it is surely conceivable that a great part of the objections against Revelation may, in time, disappear; and though other objections may be the result of the progress of the older sciences or the origination of new,—still the solution of previous objections, together with the additions to the evidences of

Christianity, external and internal, which the study of history and of the Scriptures may supply, and the brighter and brighter light cast by the progress of Christianity and the fulfilment of its prophecies, may inspire increasing confidence that the new objections are also destined to yield to similar solvents. Meanwhile, such new difficulties, together with those more awful and gigantic shadows which we have no reason to believe will ever be chased from the sacred page,—mysteries which could not be explained from the necessary limitation of our faculties, and are, at all events, submitted to us as a salutary discipline of our humility,—will continue to form that exercise of faith which is perhaps nearly equal in every age; and necessary in all ages, if we would be made 'little children,' qualified 'to enter the kingdom of God.'

In conclusion; while many are proclaiming that Christianity is effete, and that, in the language of M. Proudhon (who complacently says it amidst the ignominious failure of a thousand social panaceas of his own age and country), it will certainly 'die out in about three hundred years;' while many more proclaim that, as a religion of supernatural origin and supernatural evidence, it is already dying, if not dead; it were surely not unreasonable to remind them that, even if Christianity *be* false, as they allege, they are utterly forgetting the maxims of a cautious induction, in saying that it will therefore cease to exert dominion over

mankind. What proof is there of this? Whether true or false, it has already survived numberless revolutions of human opinions, and all sorts of changes and assaults. It is not confined, like other religions, to any one race —to any one clime—or any one form of political constitution. And while it transmigrates freely from race to race, and clime to clime, its chief home is still in the bosom of enterprise, wealth, science, and civilisation; and it is at this moment most powerful amongst the nations that have most of these. If not true, it has such an *appearance* of truth as to have satisfied many of the acutest and most powerful intellects of the species; —a Bacon, a Pascal, a Leibnitz, a Locke, a Newton, a Butler;—such an appearance of truth as to have enlisted in its support an immense array of genius and learning: genius and learning, not only in some sense professional, and often wrongfully represented as therefore interested, but much of both, strictly extra-professional; animated to its defence by nothing but a conviction of the force of the arguments by which its truth is sustained, and that 'hope full of immortality' which its promises have inspired. Under such circumstances it must appear equally rash and gratuitous to suppose, even if it be a delusion, that an institute, which has thus enlisted the sympathies of so many of the greatest minds of all races and of all ages—which is alone stable and progressive amidst instability and fluctuation,—will *soon* come to an end. Still more absurdly prema-

ture is it to raise a pæan over its fall upon every new attack upon it, when it has already survived so many. This, in fact, is a tone which, though every age renews it, should long since have been rebuked by the constant falsification of similar prophecies, from the time of Julian to the time of Bolingbroke, and from the time of Bolingbroke to the time of Strauss. As Addison, if we mistake not, humorously tells the Atheist, that he is hasty in his logic when he infers that if there be no God, immortality must be a delusion: since, if chance has actually found him a place in this bad world, it *may*, perchance, hereafter find him another place in a worse;—so we say, that if Christianity be a delusion, since it is a delusion which has been proof against so much of bitter opposition, and has imposed upon such hosts of mighty intellects, there is nothing to show that it will not do so still, in spite of the efforts either of a Proudhon or a Strauss. Such a tone was, perhaps, never so triumphant as during the heat of the Deistical controversy in our own country, and to which Butler alludes with so much characteristic but deeply satirical simplicity in the preface to his great work. 'It is come,' says he, 'I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry, but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. . . . On the contrary, thus much at least will here be found, not taken for granted, but proved, that any reasonable man,

who will thoroughly consider the matter, may be as much assured as he is of his own being, *that it is not, however, so clear that there is nothing in it.*' The Christian, we conceive, may now say the same to the new race of infidels in our own day. Christianity, we doubt not, will still live, when they and their works, and the refutations of their works, are alike forgotten; and a fresh series of attacks and defences shall have occupied for a while (as so many others have done) the attention of the world. Christianity, like Rome, has had both the Gaul and Hannibal at her gates: But as the 'Eternal City,' in the latter case, calmly offered for sale, and sold, at an undepreciated price, the very ground on which the Carthaginian had fixed his camp, with equal calmness may Christianity imitate her example of magnanimity. She may feel assured that, as in so many past instances of premature triumph on the part of her enemies, the ground they occupy will one day be her own; that the very discoveries, apparently hostile, of science and philosophy, will be ultimately found elements of her strength. Thus has it been, to a great extent, with the discoveries in chronology and history; and thus it will be, we are confident (and to a certain extent has been already), with those in geology. That science has done much, not only to render the old theories of Atheism untenable, and to familiarise the minds of men to the idea of miracles, by that of successive creations, but to confirm

the scriptural statement of the comparatively recent origin of our race. Only the men of science and the men of theology must alike guard against the besetting fallacy of their kind,—that of too hastily taking for granted that they already know the whole of their respective sciences, and of forgetting the declaration of the Apostle, equally true of all man's attainments, whether in one department of science or another,—'We know but in part, and we prophesy but in part.'

There are no doubt some minds of undeniable power, who have bewildered themselves by *really* deep meditation on inexplicable mysteries; who ask for certainty where certainty is not given to man, or demand for truths which are established by sufficient evidence, *other* evidence than those truths will admit. We can even painfully sympathise in that ordeal of doubt to which such minds are peculiarly exposed—with their Titanic struggles against the limitations imposed by Him who has said to the turbulent intellect of man, as well as to the stormy ocean, 'Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further,—and here shall thy proud waves be staid.'

But we are at the same time fully convinced that in our day there are thousands of youths who are falling into the same errors and perils from sheer vanity and affectation; who admire most what they least understand, and adopt all the obscurities and paradoxes they stumble upon, as a cheap path to a reputation

for profundity; who awkwardly imitate the manner and retail the phrases of the writers they study; and, as usual in such cases, exaggerate to caricature their least agreeable eccentricities. We should think that some of these more powerful minds must be by this time ashamed of that ragged regiment of most shallow thinkers and obscure writers and talkers who at present* infest our literature, and whose parrot-like repetition of their own stereotyped phraseology, mingled with some barbarous infusion of half-Anglicised German, threatens to form as odious a *cant* as ever polluted the stream of thought, or disfigured the purity of language. Happily it is not likely to be more than a passing fashion; but still it is a very unpleasant fashion while it lasts. As in Johnson's day, every young writer imitated as well as he could the ponderous diction and everlasting antithesis of the great dictator; as in Byron's day, there were thousands to whom the world 'was a blank' at twenty or thereabouts, and of whose 'dark imaginings,' as Macaulay says, there was no end; so now there are hundreds of dilettanti pantheists, mystics and sceptics, to whom everything is a 'sham,' an 'unreality;' who tell us that the world stands in need of a great 'prophet,' a 'seer,' a 'true priest,' a 'large soul,' a 'god-like soul,'—who shall dive into 'the depths of the human consciousness,' and whose 'utterances' shall rouse the human

* 1849.

mind from the 'cheats and frauds' which have hitherto everywhere practised on its simplicity. They tell us, in relation to philosophy, religion, and especially in relation to Christianity, that all that has been believed by mankind has been believed only on 'empirical' grounds; and that the old answers to difficulties will do no longer. They shake their sage heads at such men as Clarke, Paley, Butler, and declare that such arguments as theirs will not satisfy *them*.—We are glad to admit that all this vague pretension is now but rarely displayed in conjunction with the scurrilous spirit of that elder unbelief against which the long series of British apologists for Christianity arose between 1700 and 1750; but there is often in it an arrogance as real, though not in so offensive a form. Sometimes the spirit of unbelief even assumes an air of sentimental regret at its own inconvenient profundity. Many a worthy youth tells us he almost wishes he *could* believe. He admires, of all things, the 'moral grandeur'—the 'ethical beauty' of many parts of Christianity; he condescends to patronise Jesus Christ, though he believes that the great mass of words and actions, by which alone we know anything about him, are sheer fictions or legends; he believes — gratuitously enough on his theory, for he has no ground for it—that Jesus Christ was a very 'great man,' worthy of comparison at least with Mahomet, Luther, Napoleon, and 'other heroes;' he

even admits the happiness of a simple, child-like faith in the puerilities of Christianity—it produces such content of mind! But alas! *he* cannot believe—his intellect is not satisfied—he has revolved the matter too profoundly to be thus taken in; he must, he supposes (and our beardless philosopher sighs as he says it), bear the penalty of a too restless intellect, and a too speculative genius: he knows all the usual arguments which satisfied Pascal, Butler, Bacon, Leibnitz; but they will do no longer: more radical, more tremendous difficulties have suggested themselves, 'from the depths of philosophy,' and far different answers are required now!

It may be feared that many young minds in our day* are exposed to the danger of falling into one or other of the prevailing forms of unbelief, and especially into that of pantheistic mysticism, from rashly meditating in the cloudy regions of German philosophy, on difficulties which would seem beyond the limits of human reason, but which that philosophy too often promises to solve—with what success we may see from the rapid succession and impenetrable obscurities of its various systems. But men are slow to learn that one of the highest achievements of philosophy is to

* This was written nearly twenty years ago, since which time the *furore* for German metaphysics, and the tendency to employ it as a weapon of theological scepticism has much abated. The present tendencies to scepticism are found rather in the direction of physical science.

know when it is vain to philosophise. When the obscure principles of these most uncouth philosophies, expressed, we verily believe, in the darkest language ever used by civilised man, are applied to the solution of the problems of theology and ethics, no wonder that the natural consequence, as well as just retribution, of such temerity is a plunge into tenfold night.

Systems of German philosophy may perhaps be advantageously studied by those who are mature enough to study them; but that they have an incomparable power of *intoxicating* the intellect of the young aspirant to their mysteries is, we think, undeniable. They have often been observed to produce this effect on the minds of young students, who becloud themselves in the vain attempt to comprehend ill-translated fragments of ill-understood philosophies (executed in a sort of Anglicised-German, or Germanised-English, we know not which to call it, but certainly neither German nor English), from the perusal of which they carry away nothing but some very obscure terms, on which they themselves have superinduced a very vague meaning. These terms you in vain implore them to define; or, if they define them, they define them in terms which as much need definition. Heartily were it to be wished that Socrates would reappear amongst us, to exercise his accoucheur's art on these hapless Theætetuses and Menos of our day!

Many of them, no doubt, would reply at first to

the sarcastic querist (who might ironically complain of a slight cloudiness in their speculations), that the truths they uttered were too profound for ordinary reasoners. We may easily imagine how Socrates would have dealt with such assumptions. His reply would be rather more severe than that of Mackintosh to Coleridge, in a somewhat similar case;—namely, that if a notion cannot be made clear to persons who have spent the better part of their days in revolving the difficulties of metaphysics and philosophy, and who are conscious that they are not destitute of patience for the effort requisite to understand them, it may suggest a doubt whether the fault be not in the medium of communication rather than elsewhere; and, indeed, whether the philosopher be not aiming to communicate thoughts on subjects on which man can have no thoughts to communicate. Socrates would add, perhaps, that language was given us to express, not to conceal our conceptions; and that, if they cannot be communicated, invaluable as they doubtless are, we had better keep them to ourselves; one thing it is clear he would do, —he would insist on precise definitions.—But, in truth, it may be more than surmised that the obscurities of which all complain, except those (and in our day they are not a few) to whom obscurity is a recommendation, result from allowing the intellect to speculate in realms forbidden to its access: of venturing into caverns of tremendous depth and darkness, with nothing better

than a dim rushlight. Surely we have reason to suspect as much when some learned professor, after muttering his logical incantations, and conjuring with his logical formulæ, surprises you by saying, that he has disposed of the great mysteries of existence and the universe, and solved to your entire satisfaction, in his own curt way, the problems of the ABSOLUTE and the INFINITE! If the cardinal truths of philosophy and religion, hitherto received, are doomed to be imperilled by such speculations, one feels strongly inclined to pray with the old Homeric hero,—'that if they must perish, it may be at least in daylight!'

We earnestly counsel the youthful reader to defer the study of German philosophy, at least till he has matured and disciplined his mind, and familiarised himself with the best models of what used to be our boast—English clearness of thought and expression. He will then learn to ask rigidly for definitions, and not rest satisfied with half-meanings, or no meaning. To the naturally venturous pertinacity of young metaphysicians, few would be disposed to be more indulgent than ourselves. From the time of Plato downwards—who tells us that no sooner do they 'taste' of dialectics than they are ready to dispute with everybody, 'sparing neither father nor mother, scarcely even the lower animals, if they had but a voice to reply'—they have always expected more from metaphysics than (except as a *discipline*, and in that respect

they cannot well be overrated) they will ever yield. He elsewhere, still more humorously, describes the same trait. He compares them to young dogs, who are perpetually snapping at everything about them.* But it is certainly lamentable when they take to amusing themselves—as many 'old dogs' amongst our neighbours (who ought to have known better) have done—by tearing into tatters the sacred leaves of that volume, which contains what is better than all their philosophy.

But 'oh! these insupportable evidences!' many minds in the present day are ready to exclaim. 'Are we to find our way to truth through all these tangled mazes of learning and criticism? Cannot a man be a Christian without traversing these labyrinths?'

Assuredly he may. It is happily no more necessary that a man should have examined, with the utmost degree of exactness, the whole field of the Christian evidences, than that he must be a profound astronomer before he can be qualified to embrace the Copernican theory. A few great facts are, on most subjects, sufficient to form the convictions of men; profound knowledge in each is left to those who are necessitated, or predisposed, or at leisure to attain it. And even that

* Οἶμαι γάρ σε οὐ λελῃθέναι, ὅτι οἱ μειρακίσκοι, ὅταν τὸ πρῶτον λόγων γεύωνται, ὡς παιδιᾷ αὐτοῖς καταχρῶνται, ἀεὶ εἰς ἀντιλογίαν χρώμενοι καὶ μιμούμενοι τοὺς ἐξελέγχοντας αὐτοί ἄλλους ἐλέγχουσι, χαίροντες ὥσπερ σκυλάκια τῷ ἕλκειν τε καὶ σπαράττειν τοὺς πλησίον ἀεί.

profound knowledge is profound only by comparison; in reference to the possible knowledge of any subject, each man's actual knowledge may well be called superficial. Nor is there any in which the exactest study will not disclose a thousand difficulties, and provoke a thousand controversies. What then? *That* fact does not disturb our convictions, nor engage us in a life-long study of the minutiæ of any one subject; if it did, we should never go to another, for we should never have exhausted that one. Ethics, Politics, Law, and Medicine, quite as much as Theology, furnish us with abundant examples of satisfactory conviction and resolute practice on very unsatisfactory and imperfect knowledge.

Nor, thorny as may be the controversies in which the infidel may involve the Christian, or in which the Christian may involve himself, if he be resolved to investigate this subject with the greatest possible degree of minuteness, are they more thorny than those common to any other subject, where the appeal is to 'moral evidence,' and where, consequently, the perception of the force of that evidence depends, in some measure, on an unprejudiced mind and a rectified will; where, as Pascal says, the 'heart' is apt to whisper its 'reasons, which the reason cannot comprehend.' Hence no truth (such is the condition of humanity) is established without conflict and controversy; and even then it is by a very tardy process.

Lastly, it may be asked, whether those eccentric Christians, who in these days decry the Christian Evidences, find less controversy necessary to the establishment of any other basis of religious truth? Do they find it at all more easy to establish among mankind the claims of their 'insight,'—their 'natural light,'—their 'religious instinct,'—their 'intuitional consciousness?' Can they make their oracle utter a uniform response? Can they convince the bulk of men that it is an unambiguous oracle at all? Are its nature—powers—limits—decisions—less subject to doubt and disputation, than the evidences of Christianity? Are the metaphysical and ethical problems to which the one gives rise more easy of solution than the historical problems involved in the other? Few will affirm it, who know what the history of Metaphysics and Ethics really is.

On the other hand, are those who maintain that we are to refer, amidst these difficulties, to an infallible human oracle, able to prevail on mankind to admit either its necessity or its possibility? Are they without disputes themselves in whom the infallibility resides—or as to how far it extends?

We must be contented with our lot. On no hypothesis, by no artifice, can man evade those difficulties which form the necessary discipline, the alternate exercise of his Reason and his Faith, and by which he is trained to docility, humility, and patience. The con-

dition of man will ever be that so forcibly painted in one of the fragments of Pascal: 'Il faut avoir ces trois qualités: pyrrhonien, géomètre, chrétien soumis; et elles s'accordent et se tempèrent en doutant où il faut, en assurant où il faut, en se soumettant où il faut.'

Though Socrates perhaps expressed himself too absolutely when he said that 'he only knew that he knew nothing,' yet a tinge of the same spirit—a deep conviction of the profound ignorance of the human mind, even at its best—has ever been a characteristic of the most comprehensive genius. It is a topic on which it has been fond of pensively dilating. It is thus with Socrates, with Plato, with Bacon (even amidst all his magnificent aspirations and bold predictions), with Newton, with Pascal, and especially with Butler, in whom, if in any, the sentiment is carried to excess. It need not be said that it is seldom found in the writings of those modern speculators who rush, in the hardihood of their adventurous logic, on a solution of the problems of the Absolute and the Infinite, and resolve in delightfully brief demonstrations the mightiest problems of the universe; those great enigmas from which true philosophy shrinks, not because it has never ventured to think of them, but because it has thought of them enough to know that it is in vain to attempt their solution. To know the limits of human philosophy is 'the better part' of all philosophy; and though the conviction of our ignorance is humiliating, it is, like

every true conviction, salutary. Amidst this night of the soul, bright stars—far distant fountains of illumination—are wont to steal out, which shine not while the imagined Sun of reason is above the horizon; and it is in that night, as in the darkness of outward nature, that we gain our only true ideas of the illimitable dimensions of the universe, and of our true position in it.

Meanwhile we conclude that God has created 'two great lights,'—the greater light to rule man's busy day—and that is Reason; and the lesser to rule his contemplative night—and that is Faith.

But Faith herself shines only so long as she reflects some faint illumination from the brighter orb.

APPENDIX.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF STRAUSS'S LIFE OF JESUS.

THE inadmissibility of the principle of Strauss's theory of the 'mythical' origin of Christianity could alone be discussed within the contracted limits of the preceding essay. It is there contended, and, it is conceived, with reason, that his theory does not account even for the origin, much less for the success, of *such* a 'myth' as Christianity. It does not account for the *origin*; since the more the historic conditions of the problem are investigated, the more improbable will it appear that such a 'myth'—whether we look at its intellectual or moral characteristics—could have been the product of the Jewish mind of any age, and its known prepossessions; and quite as improbable that if it could have been such a wild-growth of popular fancy and legend, it should have accidentally assumed such varied, and, in the judgment of so many acute minds, such irrefragable, proofs of historic credibility. The theory accounts still less for its *success*; inasmuch as it is incredible that such a 'myth,' involving, if nothing but a 'myth,' such extravagant and preposterous demands on credulity, should, in the absence of the wonderful events which form its basis, be actually received as *fact*, not only by a large portion of the Jews, but by still larger portions of many other nations, whose

whole sympathies and antipathies, prejudices and prepossessions, were enlisted against it; and who, so far from being interested in the Jewish legends, in which it is supposed to have germinated, recoiled with intense repugnance from them all. In truth nothing less than a universal lunacy of the nations will account, under such circumstances, for its reception by them.

Mere admiration of the *beauty* of such fictitious creations cannot account for such a fact. Different races and nations admire, and admire intensely, Homer's Iliad, the Arabian Nights and Shakspeare's Plays; but these immortal works have never advanced one inch for all that towards being received as true history. As little can the mere *assumption* of Divine authority on behalf of such legends solve the mystery: such assumption in an enlightened age, and especially among races alien from the nation who have originated such pretensions, are certain to provoke scepticism far more strongly than they invite superstition. The Classical mythology, the Egyptian mythology, and the Hindoo mythology (always restricted to the nations in whose remote barbarism they originated, and with whose immemorial traditions they were intertwined), may be studied long enough before they make a single proselyte among those different races and different nations who did receive, who have received, and who persist in receiving the *myths* of Christianity as historic *verities*. So that the very least that can be said is, that the unknown compilers of the gospel have, with an utterly incomprehensible ingenuity, infinitely transcended all other masters of fable and legend, and have succeeded in making dreams wilder than ever poet feigned wear to minds of different ages and races (for here lies the stress of the argument) the aspect of genuine history.

But though the *principle* alone of Dr. Strauss's theory could be considered in the previous pages, it seemed de-

sirable to describe a little more fully some of the prevailing characteristics of his insidious work. This, after a calm and, so far as possible, impartial study of it, is accordingly attempted in the ensuing pages. To track the author into all his details would, of course, require a work nearly as voluminous as his own. But it is conceived that the following observations, however general, may be in some degree useful in putting the young and unlearned reader upon his guard.

First, then; it may be observed, that the title of the work is ambiguous. Instead of being called 'the Life of Jesus' ('critically examined,' or otherwise), it ought rather to be entitled 'A *collection* of all the difficulties and discrepancies which honest criticism has discovered, and perverted ingenuity has imagined, in the four Evangelists.'*

Secondly; though composed certainly in a very calm, or rather in a very frigid, style, there perhaps hardly ever was a book which gives the reader a stronger impression of partisanship, or more completely exemplifies the idea conveyed in a favourite term of the Germans, 'one-sidedness' (*Einseitigkeit*).

Every candid mind must admit that the question of the truth of Christianity is a question of conflicting probabilities. Now, though we could scarcely expect to find in Strauss's work, devoted as it is to a special branch of the vast theme, an examination and refutation of the evidence for the truth of Christianity as derived from external sources (the incredibility, nay, the *impossibility*, of miracles he quietly takes for granted†), yet one might have justly

* 'As for his doctrines,' Quinet says, 'There is not, I think, one of his boldest propositions which had not previously been advanced, sustained, and debated. How, then, can we account for the celebrity of a work which appears to be the result of a *general spoliation*?'

† As this is an important point, it may be as well to cite Dr. Strauss's express words:—'Indeed no just notion of the true nature

expected that, in endeavouring to reduce the gospels to myth, by exhibiting their *supposed discrepancies*, he would have given some space at least to the consideration of those immensely varied *internal* indications of truthfulness, artlessness, and reality, of those undesigned, because deeply latent, coincidences, with which they obviously abound. These indications of historic verity would, at first sight, seem beyond the reach of deliberate fiction, and much more of accident; while in number they far exceed the aggregate of those discrepancies with which, in justice, they ought to be confronted and compared. Strauss cannot but be aware that this general exquisite tone of historic reality is not imaginary; inasmuch as, if it be the effect of 'art' or 'accident,' it has imposed on myriads of the acutest minds, and still imposes on them, in spite of all the efforts of that long array of infidels whose rusty weapons he has burnished and sharpened. Yet from Dr. Strauss's work not the slightest notion could be formed, that there were any such evidences to be examined; one would suppose that the gospels were little more than a tissue of contradictions and discrepancies, and had little else to recommend them to mankind; whose credulous deference to them, if this were true, would be a perfectly unaccountable phenomenon, more incredible than any of the miracles our author pronounces impossible. Indeed, prudence itself should have made him more candid; for the more incongruous and contradictory he proves the gospels, the more arduous he makes the problem imposed on infidelity,—of accounting for

of history is possible, without a perception of the inviolability of the chain of second causes and of the *impossibility of miracles*.' (Vol. i. Introduction, sect. 13, p. 64, English Translation.) All the author had to do was to prove this, and he might have spared his large volumes of minute criticism.

their reception and success. If nothing were in them but what he finds there,—*that* difficulty neither he nor any man would have had to encounter.

Dr. Strauss may say, perhaps, that it was not his business to exhibit the other side of the argument; we believe him; or rather, we believe that it was not his *pleasure*; for it *was* his business. The truth is, he was an advocate, not a judge; a special pleader for infidelity, not the dispassionate investigator he would be thought to be; otherwise he could not have failed to notice some of those opposing considerations which have imposed, if they are ill founded, on many of the greatest minds of the species; which made a Newton say, that he discerned more indications of genuineness, authenticity, and truthfulness in the Scriptures than in any other books whatsoever.

A mind intent on truth would have endeavoured to balance the evidence; it is sufficient for Dr. Strauss to exhibit one side. It is as though he hoped, and not vainly (for, from the constitution of the human mind, it is assuredly a very probable result), that, by keeping the thoughts of the reader intent for a sufficient time *exclusively* on alleged objections and discrepancies, he might produce, by their mere accumulation, an effect which would be in some danger of being dissipated either by the statement of the counter-evidence or by a moderate recital of only the real difficulties. To let the mind exist for a time in an atmosphere of doubt is one of the easiest and most compendious ways of destroying faith.*

* This is often the effect even of works the very object of which is the *refutation* of objections, if they are too exclusively devoted to such refutation. Speaking of some such works, Dr. Graves, in the introduction to his work on the Pentateuch, well observes, 'Those who were employed in refuting the objections of any one particular

Accordingly, our author seems much more solicitous about the number than about the quality of the objections ; and is often as fond of exaggerating the task of reconciling points, even where he at last allows that reconciliation is possible, as of exhibiting the force of more formidable objections. In a word, there is no work in the perusal of which it is more necessary for the reader to remember the maxim, '*audi alteram partem.*'

Thirdly ; but whether it was Dr. Strauss's exclusive business or pleasure—whichever the reader pleases—to detect 'holes' in the garments of the evangelists, has he ever made the rents which he pretends only to find? In a word, has he dealt fairly by the *objections*? We fearlessly answer that he has not. The paraded discrepancies are frequently assumed ; sometimes even manufactured.

Let us take an example by way of illustration. The

antagonist, were almost inevitably led to magnify these objections beyond their relative importance in any general consideration of the subject. The same writers also were frequently induced to employ their attention almost exclusively on such passages as seemed obscure or objectionable, and pass with less distinct notice the clear and direct arguments and proofs which were to be derived from those parts of the Sacred History which scepticism itself could scarcely venture to attack ; thus suffering the adversary of revealed truth to lead its advocate from the strongest to the weakest ground, and prevent him from employing those topics which would operate most powerfully on every candid and unprejudiced mind. Works constructed on this plan have sometimes a most pernicious effect on the young, the uninformed, and the wavering ; they lead them to consider Revelation as consisting chiefly of obscurities, and founded chiefly on questionable facts ; while, on the contrary, the great truths it establishes are as clear and as intelligible as they are important ; and the series of proofs on which it rests, when viewed in their natural order, are so firmly connected and plainly conclusive, that, if considered with attention and candour, they carry with them the fullest conviction.'

account of the entertainment given to Jesus at Bethany before the last Passover, which has often attracted the attention of the Harmonists, is related by Matthew, Mark, and John. It is nearly the universal opinion of critics, that these evangelists refer to the same event, and that the entertainment is a totally different one from that described by Luke.* This last was apparently given at a different time, in a different place, and under different circumstances. One incident indeed of a similar nature is recorded in both; namely, the grateful act of a woman (very differently characterised, however, in the two cases), who shows her love to the Lord by a costly act of personal homage. Everything else is different.†

Now, in the account of the entertainment at Bethany, as described by Matthew, Mark, and John, there is absolutely *no note of time*; and unless such time were fixed in the narrative itself, or the narrative itself formed part of a work of professed chronology, we should have no right to fix it; for nothing is more common in regular history, and still more in biographical *collectanea* (which is probably the most characteristic description of the Gospels), to introduce an incident—not because it occurred at the same time with those amidst which it is inserted—but to throw some light on them, or supply some link in relation to them.

Yet Strauss, without qualification, says, 'Neither is the

* Ch. vii. 36–50.

† Greswell says, 'The unction at Bethany is recorded by St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. John, between any of whose accounts and Luke (vii. 36–50), where also an unction is related, the difference is, as I think, so palpable and so indisputable, that, notwithstanding the trouble which some learned men have taken to prove them the same, I should consider it a waste of time and argument seriously to prove them distinct.'—Greswell's *Dissertations upon the Harmony of the Gospels*, vol. ii. p. 127.

time of the occurrence precisely the same ; for, *according to Matthew and Mark*, the scene takes place after the solemn entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, only *two days*, at the utmost, before the Passover ; *according to John*, on the other hand, before the entrance, as early as *six* days prior to the Passover.'* This *positive* statement of the time (as if it were specified in the evangelists, while in fact it is merely inferred by Strauss from the context), is a specimen of his usual licence. He assumes that he may treat the gospels as if they were chronological tables. Though no date is affixed to the incident in question, he chooses to place it between the two nearest dates he can find ; and then gives the date, not as if it were an infer-

* John says (xii. 1) that Christ came to Bethany 'six days before the Passover ;' and in ver. 12, that 'on the morrow' he made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The account of the entertainment, as also a statement of the resort of many Jews to Bethany to see Jesus, falls between these notes of time ; if then it did not occur on the evening previous to the entry (Jesus returned to Bethany, let us recollect, on several successive evenings), John may have *anticipated* these transactions at Bethany for some special reason ; and in this case the τῇ ἐπαύριον will be connected with the note of time in the first verse of the chapter. On the other hand, if it be more natural to connect that note of time with the entertainment, it does not prevent the supposition that, for some special reason (as Greswell and Robinson both think), Matthew and Mark may have *postponed* their account of it. One states that two days before the Passover, Jesus predicts his approaching betrayal, and the other that at that date his enemies were plotting his death. Both afterwards give an account of the incident at Bethany, but, like John, without *any note of time*. Neither John nor they limit the time in the incident itself ; if the context in John be assumed to fix it, we need not assume that theirs does ; if theirs be assumed to fix it, we need not assume that John's does. Strauss assumes both, and then speaks as if he had assumed nothing.

ence of his own, but as if the evangelists had inserted it in the account of the incident itself!

Again: Matthew and Mark say, the woman poured the ointment on Christ's head; John, that she anointed His feet. 'Here is another discrepancy,' exclaims Dr. Strauss. 'How so?' it may be rejoined. 'May not both be true?'—Once more; Matthew says, that 'his disciples,'—Mark, that 'some of them who were present'—John, that 'Judas'—manifested indignation at the spectacle. 'Here are more discrepancies,' exclaims Dr. Strauss. 'Why so?' it may be retorted again. 'Why might not all have been right?'—And to show that the narrative involves no contradiction, may it not be asked, whether, if the *same* historian had said 'that the woman broke an alabaster box of ointment, and both poured the perfume on the Lord's head, and also anointed His feet; that some who were present murmured, and amongst the rest Judas;' would Dr. Strauss, or anyone else, have thought there was anything in it which challenged criticism? Why then should he affirm it, because a portion of the facts appears in one historian, and a portion in another?

Again: Matthew and Mark expressly describe this entertainment in Bethany as taking place at the house of 'Simon the Leper.' John does not mention the name of the host; but still states that it was in Bethany; that Mary the sister of Lazarus was the person who broke the box of ointment; that Martha served. Matthew and Mark were most probably mistaken, argues Dr. Strauss; from the above particulars, it *must* have been in the house of Lazarus that the entertainment was given! And this too, although Lazarus himself is introduced by John in terms which much more naturally suggest the idea that He was a guest rather than the host. 'He was one of those who sat at table with Jesus' (*τῶν συνανακειμένων αὐτῷ*). The reason, however, of the arbitrary conjecture

is immediately obvious. Having by this licence of suppositions *proved*, (in his way,) that John meant that the scene took place in the house of Lazarus, though he does not say that it did; and that therefore Matthew and Mark are in error, when they positively say it took place *elsewhere*, he not only concludes that Matthew and Mark hastily wrote on erroneous information; but that such divergences (entirely of his own making, be it remembered) justify the supposition that the wholly different narrative given by Luke is but a distorted account of the same entertainment, and affords a further proof of the facility with which the legends of the Gospel were varied, augmented, and embellished! That is, having tortured the very variations in the *same* narrative (which simply prove that there was no collusion) into a proof that parts of the narrative are successive products of fiction, he proceeds to argue that a narrative of a totally different event is but another variation of the same variations; and then, assuming that it was so, proceeds complacently to draw his conclusion that nearly the whole is divested of historic credibility. Yet he has nothing whatever to found this assumed identification of the two narratives upon, except that it does not seem probable that *two* women should have proferred a not unusual mark of respect (though more costly than usual) to an honoured guest; costly in this case, because proportionate to the love and veneration of those who paid it, towards their great Master and Benefactor.

In short, there is nothing which may not be proved or disproved in history by such a style of criticism—such a licence of conjecture and assumption. There are no historic writers in the world whose narratives might not be resolved into *myths* by the consistent application of the same artifices.

There is no injustice in saying that a very large propor-

tion of the difficulties on which Dr. Strauss expatiates are, in the same manner, difficulties which he assumes to be insoluble, because he first assumes the conditions which make them so. Such a critic is to historic truth what the concave lens is to light. Parallel rays become divergent, and convergent rays are rendered parallel. At all events, they have a focus as distant as our author chooses to place it.

Fourthly; our author appears to act on certain comprehensive, though novel canons of historic criticism, the adoption of which renders his present task, or any other achievement of the like kind which he may propose to himself, a very easy one; as, first, that if an event be not in his judgment probable, that circumstance shall often be sufficient at once to neutralise the positive testimony which affirms it; secondly, that if he can point to an event or narrative in the Old Testament *analogous* to one in the New, the former may be adduced as a proof of the mythical origin of the latter; thirdly, that if the 'not probable' reaches, in his judgment, the impossible, (in which category he ranks both miracle and prophecy,) it is to be rejected at once,—which of course *ought* to supersede all discussion with regard to the majority of the narratives of the gospels; fourthly, if a narrative is summary and general, it may be suspected that the author had no personal knowledge of the facts; if it is full of little dramatic traits, he may be suspected of embellishment. A word or two on each of these, accompanied by as many illustrations.*

* The more important of these novel canons are expressly avowed by Strauss, in laying down his 'criteria by which to distinguish the unhistorical in the Gospel narrative.'—*Introduction*, sect. 16. 'We may summarily reject,' he tells us, 'all miracles, prophecies, narratives of angels and of demons, and the like, as simply "impossible," and irreconcilable with the known and universal laws which govern the

1. Such and such an event, or such and such a conjunction of events, Dr. Strauss often thinks it sufficient at once to dismiss, as in his judgment *improbable.* Thus he finds that Jesus is represented as making a disclosure of his Messiahship to the woman of Samaria: 'What could induce Jesus to send roaming into the futurity of religious history the contemplation of a woman, whom he should rather have induced *to examine herself, and to*

course of events;' he deciding (but, unhappily, not *proving*) that 'the Absolute Cause never disturbs the chain of secondary causes by single arbitrary acts of interposition.'—We are, in a similar manner, to regard, with extreme suspicion, whatever does not follow the *ordinary* experience of mortals; as, for example, any very extraordinary precocity in an individual; or, what is 'psychologically improbable,' as when a person is described as 'feeling, thinking, acting, in a manner directly opposed to his own habitual mode and that of men in general;' a rule which, considering that half history is a record of human inconsistencies — many of them outrageous enough — is, even in Strauss' judgment, to be 'cautiously applied.' Indeed, if *his* theory of Christianity be true, its reception by mankind is itself the strangest of all these 'psychological' inconsistencies; so that he ought by rights to abandon his theory by this very *criterion* for justly applying it; and affirm either that Christianity *must* be true, or that it has *not* been believed! Lastly, 'If the form be poetical, or the actors converse in a more *diffuse* and elevated strain than might be *expected from their training and situations*, such discourses, at all events, are not to be regarded as historical;' but then, conveniently enough, the 'absence of these marks of the "unhistorical" are also quite compatible with the mythical character of the composition, since the mythus often wears the most simple and apparently historical form.' By these means, the banquet of history may be made as airy as that which feasted the eyes and mocked the stomach of the craving Sancho, in his island of Barataria. There is not a dish which the wand of our critical Pedro Rezio de Aguero cannot cause to vanish from the table; and it is well if he allows us the 'hundred-confected wafers, and a few thin slices of quince.

ponder on the corruptions of her own heart?' As Dr. Strauss can find no satisfactory answer unless it were a vain-glorious wish to elicit from her, 'at any cost,' an acknowledgment of Messianic claims; and as it would be unjust to ascribe this design to Jesus, we must impute the incident to 'the glorifying legend' or 'the idealising biographer.'—He finds it stated that the disciples mistook those words of our Lord, 'Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep;' it is improbable, he says. —He thinks the same of their misconstruction of his words at the well of Samaria, 'I have meat to eat that ye know not of.' 'It is in the fourth evangelist's *manner*,' says our author, 'which we have learned to recognise by so many examples. They are amongst those carnal interpretations of expressions intended spiritually by Jesus, which are of habitual occurrence in the fourth Gospel, and are therefore suspicious;' that is, whatever is *characteristic* of classes of persons must be suspicious, for such characteristic traits must be frequently recurrent.—He finds that the rulers are represented as mocking Christ on the cross, with the words, 'He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he will have him;'—it is *improbable*, says Strauss, 'for these words are taken from a Psalm, in which they are put into the mouth of the ungodly, and the Sanhedrists could not have adopted them without voluntarily assuming that character; which they would surely have taken care to avoid.' Hypocrites and murderers are not so punctilious. As if *they* were likely to be particularly solicitous about perfect consistency of character! It is a wonder Dr. Strauss did not also prove that it is 'improbable' that they would have *acted* like 'the ungodly,' and so represent as dubious the fact of the crucifixion.

In these instances of a liberal application of an entirely novel canon of historical criticism, no pains have been

taken to select the worst. They are such as occur every few pages: and as we might have selected some examples less flagrant, so we might have given very many more so.—To us it appears that a man might just as well argue that, since the rout at Cressy and Poitiers is *à priori* improbable, the return of Bonaparte from Elba improbable, his expedition to Russia improbable, we are therefore at liberty to reject these, and a thousand other events. Indeed, there is hardly anything that may not, in this quiet way, be rejected as improbable, unless it be that Dr. Strauss should ever find anything that is *probable*.

But though full of arbitrary assumptions himself, he will scarcely allow hypothesis or conjecture, (even when most fairly adopted,) by his opponents. It is strange and improbable, he argues, that supposing *Joseph* was compelled to repair to Bethlehem to the census, *Mary* should have gone with him, since only the males were required to go. 'There might be a dozen reasons, of which we know nothing,' exclaim the critics. 'But they are all imaginary reasons,' rejoins Dr. Strauss. 'And is not your "no reason" equally imaginary?' may surely be fairly retorted. '*You* are perpetually employing these "no reasons." Suffer us to imagine a few "reasons;" and we may do so with the more justice, inasmuch as any mode of reconciling alleged discrepancies of fact and statement, however hypothetical, is truly valid as a reply to your charge of *contradictions*; while an arbitrary assumption of "no reasons" for a fact asserted by an historian is universally admitted to be one of the most precarious of all modes of arguing.'

2. If our author finds any event in the Old Testament *similar* to any in the New, such analogy (often faint enough) becomes forthwith the suggestive embryo of the evangelical narrative, or one of the elements out of which it was constructed, and determines it to be instantly of

mythical origin. This is a convenient rule, since all history, sacred or profane, 'while the constitution of human nature remains the same' (to quote the language of the philosophic Thucydides) will reproduce and exhibit closely analogous events. Does he find, for example, instances of celebrated Hebrews, the children of long childless parents? That is sufficient to account for the mythical tale of the Baptist's parentage! Does he find that Jesus is represented as seated by a 'well,' when the Samaritan woman met with Him? It is that 'idyllic locality with which the old Hebrew legend associates so many critical incidents!'* Therefore, of course the incident is mythical. Jesus meets with a woman *there*; so did Eliezer meet with Rebekah, and Jacob with Rachel; and hence the evangelic fable! 'Jesus begs of the woman to let him drink; so does Eliezer of Rebekah:' nothing less than demonstration, of course, that the Gospel narrative is but an adaptation of the Old Testament facts, or rather a new romance made out of an old one! The star of Bethlehem is similarly suggested by that in the prophecy of Balaam; and the transfiguration by the visit of Moses to Sinai. The birth of Christ is made known to the shepherds at Bethlehem, while 'watching their flocks;' so is Moses 'visited by a heavenly apparition' under somewhat similar circumstances, and 'God took David from his sheepfolds to be the shepherd of his people.' Who can fail to see that such incidents are the obvious germ of the evangelical *myth*?—Into what pleasant romance may we transform history, if we are at liberty to assume what have

* He who remembers what the 'well' is and ever has been in the East, will little wonder that historic scenes are often connected with it. The frequent mention of this 'idyllic locality' in Oriental narrative is hardly more 'suspicious' than similar references to the ancient 'forum' or the modern 'market-place.'

been ignorantly taken for 'historic parallels,' to be but variations of a common 'legend.' There is an end of all history, if we are to indulge conjecture in this way. A man may as well argue that the emulous valour of the two soldiers, T. Pulfio and L. Varenus, in the fifth book of Cæsar's Gallic War, was a fiction suggested by the narrative of the similar rivals in the fourth book of the Anabasis of Xenophon; or attribute the proffer of the crown to Cromwell and its rejection by him, to the similar event related of Cæsar.

3. But when our author comes to the miraculous or the prophetic, then how delightfully easy is his talk! His curt axiom of historical criticism—that the supernatural is incredible and impossible—instantly disposes of whole chapters which would otherwise seem impressed with every internal mark, and supported by every external proof, of their truthfulness. 'The supernatural,' it is said, 'here shows we are not on historic ground; there is so much about angels, demons, miracles; of course, this is not to be literally believed, and cannot be true.'—Dr. Strauss vehemently exclaims against it as a *petitio principii*, if a critic assigns supernatural power as a solution of any difficulty. But then is it any worse than his own *petitio principii*—that a narrative is at once to be rejected *because* it involves the preternatural? In fact, it only shows that neither party in this war of critical objections can bring the contest to a decisive termination. The question must be carried higher, and the previous *general* credibility of the evidence for Christianity ascertained and determined on the entire balance of evidence. Let that be established, and it will crush to atoms by its weight the frail fabric raised on a discrepancy here and there. On the other hand, let Dr. Strauss *prove* what he so preposterously takes for granted, 'that miracles are impossible;' and he need not strain criticism, not to say honesty, to effect the

downfall of a system which is absolutely dependent on its supernatural claims, and frankly avows that dependence.

But though Dr. Strauss generally relies in the case of miracles on his usual comprehensive *à priori* reason for rejecting them, he is sometimes at the superfluous pains of trying to prove them *historically improbable*; and then exhibits his usual licence of conjecture. Thus he thinks that since the resurrection of Lazarus is not mentioned by the three first evangelists, it is most improbable that it should have been known by them; therefore it is all but certain that it was not known; if not known to them, it could only be from its not having occurred; therefore it is certainly to be rejected: an ingenious sorites, by which we may at any time dispense with the positive testimony of an historian, if we do not find what he relates, related also by other historians! But in this and other cases, if Dr. Strauss had but proved his postulatum that 'a miracle is impossible,' he might have dispensed with this circuitous way of proving, from assumptions of historic probabilities and improbabilities, that it is *also* in some degree 'improbable!'

On the same axioms our author disposes at once, by one comprehensive excision, of all possibility of proofs from prophecy; prophecy cannot be true. Yet, as before, he here employs the assumptions he denies to others. It is unreasonable, in his judgment, to infer that any event mentioned in the New Testament is a proof of the truth of ancient prophecies; because we are there in the region of the 'supernatural;' nay, by the ingenious assumptions he is pleased to make, it is impossible, even if there *are* true prophecies, that they can ever be proved to be so; since the moment he sees any apparent similarity between any statement in the Old Testament and any event in the New, that similarity, *ipso facto*, affords him indications of

the mythical origin of the New Testament narrative; and the more exact the correspondence, the stronger the indications: so that the conformity of the event no longer proves the truth of the prophecy, but the fact of the prophecy is uniformly considered the *cause* of the 'myth.' We ought not perhaps to be much surprised if in a similar way some disciple of Dr. Strauss should prove that the Jews by a sort of dramatised myth have been pleased to 'disperse' themselves 'among all nations,' and have done so at different periods of history, because they found in their ancient writings it became them to be zealous for the honour of their ancient lawgiver and prophets; that, in a similar manner, nations hostile to Christianity have embraced it, not because it was truly predicted that they should, but in order to render that declaration a true prediction; and that even such phenomena as Dr. Strauss—apparently foreshadowed in the most distinct manner—are no more than a sort of practical myths to which those prophecies have given rise! At all events, it is impossible for him to fail; for if any one pleads the conformity of an event with the prediction as a proof of the truth of the latter, our author is immediately armed with his comprehensive *postulatum*, as in the case of miracles:—'We here get into the region of the supernatural; of course nothing is to be believed there.' Have we any more business to believe his easy assumption, that circumstantial and seemingly well-attested histories are no more than universally accredited myths, constructed because men were predisposed to realise ancient prophecy? especially in the many cases in which, so far as we know the conditions of their history, they certainly could not have thus realised them if they would, and, so far as we can judge of human motives, would not have realised them in *such* a form if they could.

And here it may be worth while to observe some of the

strange consequences which must follow from the admission of Dr. Strauss' theory of the mythical origin of Christianity, namely, that it was little more than a superfœtation on Jewish prejudices, and the natural product of Messianic legends and fables. It appears, first, that the genius of that nation having ever been pre-eminently exclusive, this product of their *prejudices* is mainly characterised by the renunciation of their *prejudices*; secondly, that though the peculiar product of their *national* prepossessions, it was rejected and is still rejected by the great majority of the *nation*; thirdly, that though their ancient prophecies led them to dote upon the idea of a triumphant and conquering Messiah,—a prepossession in which the founders of Christianity seem to have originally had their full share,—this product of their prepossessions is directly opposed to that notion, and exhibits to them the repulsive novelty of a crucified and suffering Messiah; fourthly, that though their prepossessions prompted them, as they ever had done, to monopolise the favour of the Deity, these prepossessions somehow dictated a system which lays the axe at the root of that darling hypothesis; fifthly, that this product of national prepossessions, founded on old Messianic fables and myths, though it was *not* acceptable to the taste of the majority of the nation, yet was extensively received by nations to which not only *no* Messianic myths could have been acceptable, but to which all Messianic myths must have been odious; that, in short, the system did not meet the prejudices of those who, according to the theory, must have been *prejudiced* in its favour; and *did* suit the prejudices of those who, according to that or any other theory, must have been *prejudiced* against it! A curious hypothesis it would certainly be—and yet a strictly parallel one—which should assure us that a certain religious institution (making

the most enormous demands on men's credulity, if false) was the natural effect of the previous historic development and ancient prepossessions of the English, which yet was somehow vehemently rejected by the bulk of the English; but was nevertheless received implicitly by the French and other nations, their mortal enemies, to the rejection of all the institutions which had been the growth of *their own* historical development and ancient prepossessions. The fact is, that Christianity, so far from being the natural product of the previous condition of the Jewish nation, was as directly opposed to all which venerable prepossession and ancestral pride taught them most fondly to cherish, as it was to the prejudices, superstitions, and philosophy of the nations around them. St. Paul truly represents the matter when he says (in the words cited in the preceding essay) that 'Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.'

4. Another ingenious artifice of our author (though not so systematically adopted as the preceding) is, that by his arbitrary requirements, the just conditions of historical representation can never be fulfilled. Is a narrative minutely circumstantial—full of those little traits, those incidental touches and allusions, which are in general regarded as proofs of reality and truthfulness 'beyond the reach of art'? They are dramatic embellishments designed to enhance the verisimilitude of the story. Is the narrative bare and meagre? That very generality and vagueness of statement must pass for proof that the facts are not given by any one acquainted with them. Some of our author's countrymen have justly commented on this convenient ambiguity in the decisions of the critical oracle. He has been accused, he says, of 'using both the particularity and the brevity of narratives, as proofs of their mythical character.' And.

in spite of his defence, most justly. 'In all cases,' he tells us, 'in which there are extant two accounts of a single fact, the one full, the other concise, opinions may be divided as to which of them is the original. *When* these accounts have been liable to the modifications of tradition, it is important to bear in mind that tradition has *two* tendencies; the one to sublimate the concrete into the abstract, the individual into the general; the other, not less essential, to substitute arbitrary fictions for the historical reality which is lost. If then we put the want of precision in the narrative of the first evangelist to the account of the former *function* of the legend, ought we at once to regard the precision and dramatic effect of the other Gospels as a proof that their authors were eye-witnesses? Must we not rather *examine* whether these qualities be not derived from the second function of the legend?'

We soon see how summary this examination is, and in what, as a matter of course, it results. As thus:—'In detailed narratives, of which we shall presently notice many examples, while Matthew simply tells what Jesus said on a certain occasion, the two other evangelists are able to describe the glance with which his words were accompanied.* On the mention of a blind beggar of Jericho, Mark is careful to give us his name, and the name of his father.† From these *particulars* we might *already augur* what the *examination* of single narratives will prove: namely, that the *copiousness of Mark and Luke is the product of the second function* of the legend, which we may call the *function of embellishment.*' —With two such 'functions' of the 'legend,' the 'function' of the historical critic becomes easy enough.

* Mark iii. 5; x. 21; Luke vi. 10.

† Mark x. 46.

Almost every inconvenient narrative may of course easily be found too long or too short, too meagre or too minute. On such principles, if Truth herself were to *photograph* a scene of history, it would be competent to Dr. Strauss to prove that her rays were flatterers; he might exclaim, with Miss Edgeworth's Irishman, 'that the picture was more *like* than the original.'

Fifthly: At one feature in Dr. Strauss' work men will certainly do well to wonder; *i. e.* at the perfection which the critical temperament may attain. It might, *à priori*, have been thought impossible that any man, whatever his conviction that the wonderful creations of the New Testament were fictions or myths, could have glowed so little in treating of them—could have felt so little their sublimity or beauty—could have so effectually suppressed all emotion in applying to them the canons of his minute criticism—or evinced so little remorse in the attempt to destroy the impression of their historic reality. On the score of taste alone, few would have supposed it possible that a man could have treated the scene of the Last Supper—the still more wonderful scenes of Gethsemane—or those of the Cross and Sepulchre, with so little power of appreciating their intense beauty, sublimity, and pathos. An iconoclast, however stolid, could hardly take up his hammer to shiver to atoms the most exquisite forms of sculpture with the feelings of a common stonemason. It would be difficult to conceive that there is another in all the world to match our author in the *nil admirari* vein—in the power of preserving a stoical apathy in the presence of (to say the least) the divinest conceptions of uninspired genius; or one who is so utterly a stranger to that enthusiasm which must enter as an integral element into the constitution of a critic, if he is to be equipped for the discharge of any of the more elevated functions of criticism. Some degree of this enthusiasm, indeed, is essential to

their right performance; and, in its utter absence, a truly great critic can no more be formed, even though he possess cart-loads of minute learning, than any number of skeletons can make a living man. How different is the tone in which, with similar infidelity, a more poetic soul, like that of Byron or Shelley, has often broken out into spontaneous homage to the glorious poetry of the Old and New Testament!

It may be said, perhaps, that Dr. Strauss thought it his duty to suppress all emotion; if so, it must be confessed he has completely succeeded in suppressing all signs of it. It is not every man who could sponge out the pictures of Raphael without a faltering hand; or march through the galleries of the Louvre or the British Museum with the sole purpose of applying his six-inch rule to the feet and hands of each ancient statue, in order to ascertain that they exactly corresponded in length; or find out, by chipping them with his hammer—by knocking off a nose here, and an ear there—the precise mineralogical character of the stone or marble from which they were chiselled.* He gives us, more perfectly than any other

* When Dr. Strauss does deviate (as he sometimes does) from the equanimity of criticism, it certainly is not in the direction of a genial admiration for moral beauty, or sublimity, or pathos. It is to indulge himself in some approach to a joke or sneer, in which, unhappily, the will to be witty has not been seconded by nature. Some of his comments on our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem will illustrate our meaning. It is not in every man's power to be witty; but it is in every man's power to be decorous. If not too much to ask, we should request Dr. Strauss, in his next edition, to relapse, in this and some few other passages, into his native stolidity. It would be friendly advice, even for his own sake; for the 'gods have not made him witty,' any more than they made poor Audrey 'poetical;' and although it is true that he might choose subjects for his unwieldy humour in which he might give less pain to his readers, it is impossible that he

critic, a notion of that class of men who, in the bitter language of one of our own poets, can

Botanise upon their mother's grave.

It may be said that this is a question of taste. It is, but not of taste only; for, as already said, the possession of something like a *soul* is of much importance in relation to all the higher functions of criticism. A more genial temperament would not only have naturally given another tone to many of the criticisms of Strauss, but is absolutely essential to the right appreciation of many of the points of which he treats. As it is, he resembles many a commentator on our own Shakspeare, whose proper sphere is so exclusively the investigation of petty details, trivial anachronisms, incongruities of costume, and errors in geography, that they never attempt criticisms of a higher order without displaying their incompetence, and creating the very problems which they then strive to solve. In like manner Strauss often makes difficulties, when in reality there are none, and where many more philosophic critics have felt that there is none. Thus, to take a single example: he discovers something absolutely incredible in John's mission to Jesus, to inquire whether He was indeed the 'Messiah;' which, says he, after the scene at His baptism, John *could* not doubt. The probability of such doubt, only a deeper knowledge of human nature than our critic probably possesses, could teach him. When we consider the strange mutations of the human mind, under different circumstances of gladness or depression, from the liveliest hopes to the most abject

should choose any, however light or merry, in which such humour as his could give them pleasure. It is more easy to imitate Gibbon's scepticism than Gibbon's wit.

fears,—the sudden cloud of scepticism which sometimes troubles the brightness of the most undoubted conviction, and from which even the mind of a Chillingworth or a Pascal has not been always free,—the transient catalepsy which will sometimes seize the strongest faith, when strongly tried;—when we add to these general considerations the particular causes of depression in the present case, partly physical and partly mental, but all tending to produce the result in question; the influences of suffering and imprisonment,—the 'sickness of heart' which is proverbially the effect of 'hope long delayed,'—the obscurity and meanness of the supposed Messiah, contrasted probably with recent vivid expectations not only of His sudden glory, but of His assumption of a too Jewish *species* of glory (for there is no reason to believe that even the Baptist was perfectly liberated from all Jewish prejudices);—when we consider all these things, the temporary invasion of painful perplexity related by the evangelists is anything but unnatural; and with such a doubt, the historic reality of the whole simple narrative, and Christ's words of touching and solemn admonition, beautifully harmonise—'And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me!' To those who are deeply read in human nature, the phenomenon will produce little wonder; for we well know that men have come to doubt of facts of which they have been as plenarily convinced as if they had seen a miracle for their confirmation; that is, they have distrusted their own senses; and even a miracle appeals, and can appeal, to nothing stronger. In an age when a belief in the Supernatural, and that referrible to two opposite sources, was at all events common, it is still less wonderful that men should have sometimes had a momentary doubt of the heavenly source of visions, of which memory could give them no stronger proofs than of their past sensations; and even of these it appears men

may be driven to doubt. Least of all ought our author to wonder, since, upon his principles, even if he were to see a miracle, he must necessarily believe that his very senses have played him false; he having predetermined that a 'miracle is impossible.' *

Dr. Strauss closes his volumes by a solemn inquiry, which not only renders it difficult to suppose that the frigidity of his temperament has not affected his heart as well as his head, but almost makes one doubt whether he be not a mythical personage himself; so contrary are all the indications it gives, to those with which one would wish to associate intelligent and honourable humanity. He makes it a grave question, whether one who has ceased to believe in the historic validity of Christianity can rightfully occupy the post, and play the part—it is a very appropriate phrase—of a Christian minister and pastor in the Church of Christ;—performing its rites and preaching its doctrines in a sense totally different from that which his flock attach to them, but disguising, all the time, his real sentiments and real convictions! though he knows that the very men who listen to his words, and receive the sacred elements at his hands, would, could they penetrate his mask, despise and abhor him as one of the most contemptible of hypocrites! Truly, with whatever success Dr. Strauss may have reduced the history of Christianity to fable, he has certainly succeeded in metamorphosing

* Even *supposing* the gospels to be fictions or myths, we greatly doubt whether in such cases as that here treated, the men who could compose such parables, describe such scenes, portray such characters, and weave such an artful texture of *quasi*-history, were not likely to be far better judges of the 'psychologically improbable' than any Dr. Strauss; just as in any similar decision against Shakspeare, the chances would be that he had read Truth and Nature too profoundly for his critics.

its morality, and, with that, all the morality of every other religion. Out of Germany, we believe such a question as Dr. Strauss has calmly discussed could hardly be discussed at all ; and even in Germany, few, it may be suspected, would choose thus openly to plead it. Well may Menzel exclaim, 'In our learned age everything depends on Hermeneutics. A man might become a Bonze, and swear upon the symbolic books of Fo, and yet by means of a dexterous exegesis, invest the stupid books with as rational a meaning as he pleased. Folks do not alter the word ; they swear upon it, *and think of something else.*'

In one respect, the work of Dr. Strauss has been of excellent service. He has done much, not indeed to render the old hypotheses of Naturalism untenable—for that they always were—but to expose their utter absurdity. He has very successfully unroofed and dismantled these theories, and left them in desolation. Henceforth, nothing is left their inhabitants but to migrate into the land of *myths*, or take refuge in unsophisticated Christianity.

Such a work as that of Dr. Strauss is calculated to do some service also in two other ways:—1st. Since the marks of truth and reality, the minute harmonies, and undesigned, and often most refined, coincidences, in the evangelic history are much more numerous than the discrepancies, these last cannot turn the scale, while they at least prove most evidently that the evangelists did not write in concert. If they had, they would certainly, in the more important cases, have taken care to obviate such objections. If they did not write in concert, then the 'substantial unity' of the narratives, taken in connection with their 'circumstantial variety,' forms the strongest proof of their historic worth. 2ndly. As many of the internal proofs of the historic truthfulness of the Scriptures have been evolved by the attacks of infidelity, and probably would have lain hidden for ages, had not infidelity elicited

them, the same will assuredly be the result—and in a great measure has been so—in the present case. Many of the discrepancies, having been shown to be fairly reconcilable, are being transferred to the other side of the account, and no doubt more will be so as time rolls on: while those which are *not* reconcilable, and yet cannot be *proved* to involve contradictions, are at least so many arguments for the independence of the evangelic testimonies.

It may be not unreasonably surmised that the existence of such variations, if not essential to the validity of the Gospel testimony, yet involves (such is the perverseness of man) fewer provocatives of his doubts and hostility than any other alternative that could have been devised. In this, as in other instances, it will probably in time be discovered that God has in mercy exacted the least arduous test of man's faith which could be a reasonable test at all. It is not difficult to conjecture what course infidelity would have taken, had the testimony reached us in any other form. If the evangelical history had been attested only by one writer, it is easy to see what an uproar the generation of Strausses would have made about the absurdity of receiving such wonderful recitals on any single testimony; and, on the other hand, had there been several witnesses, and their accounts absolutely coincident, no less loud would have been the clamours about transparent collusion and conspiracy. It is proverbially hard to please those who will not be pleased; and impossible for Omnipotence itself to satisfy the perverse demands of men who are resolved to find or make reasons for rejecting what they are not inclined to receive. Wisdom itself cannot adopt any purely moral instruments of conviction and persuasion, of which man cannot, with self-destructive ingenuity, turn the edge.

Let us imagine a problem;—to deliver to mankind a

system of facts and doctrines (making, as it is admitted the Gospel does, large demands on faith), in the most unobjectionable manner. It is evident it must depend on no *single* testimony; it must exhibit, in its *multiplicity* of testimonies, variations enough to prove that there was no concert or collusion, and agreement enough to prove their common veracity. It may well be doubted whether any product of human ingenuity would be found to fulfil all these conditions so perfectly as the four Gospels, especially viewed in conjunction with the Acts and the Epistles. The variations, at all events, are infinitely less than those which have characterised every ordinary cycle of myths,—those gradual formations from floating popular traditions, those shapeless embodiments of popular modes of thought and feeling, associations and tendencies. When the particles of which these consist are no longer held in solution, but condense themselves into a pseudo-historic form, they never crystallise (if we may use the expression) into so near an approach to a regular solid as is presented in the evangelists. They are uniformly amorphous deposits. If Dr. Strauss doubts it, we commend to him an achievement worthy of his critical prowess. Let him, in relation to some such cycle of myths (for example, the Grecian mythology, or the legends of old Rome, or the stories of Robin Hood, or those of the Knights of the Round Table, or the Chronicles of Charlemagne), change places with his opponents; and while *they* state the historic discrepancies, incongruities, and contradictions, let *him* play the harmonist; and let him see whether he can reduce the difficulties which they will propose to him, to anything like the same vanishing quantities to which they have reduced the difficulties he proposes to them; and let the test of his success be this,—his being able to induce the powerful, acute, and cultivated minds who, after the fullest investigation, persist in

believing the historic verity of the evangelists, to receive as historical the myths he shall patronise. If he shall say that it is impossible that the experiment can be tried, inasmuch as it is impossible to resuscitate a myth which has been once exploded, we reply, that to the infidel and the heathen, the alleged 'myths' of Christianity are virtually in that condition; and yet she often converts the one to the reception of them as true history, and still oftener induces the other to reject his own living myths in favour of her alien pretensions! Dr. Strauss is welcome to attempt either course—of convincing his infidels or converting his heathens—with any circle of myths he shall choose to take under the protection of history.

After having tried both the frigid system of Paulus and the equally frigid system of Strauss—the arctic and antarctic circles of theology—equally bleak, dreary, sterile, icy—it is to be hoped that the Germans will in time find out that there are other zones and milder skies in which they may dwell in safety; where their wanderings in quest of truth may cease, and 'they may find rest unto their souls.' It is a consummation devoutly to be wished, and not altogether unreasonable to hope. But assuredly they cannot have either the enviable tranquillity of the sincere Christian or the unsafe repose of the confirmed infidel, while they will perversely aspire to the impossible luxury of being Christians and infidels at the same time, or strive to realise their arduous paradox of a 'believing unbelief.'

CRITIQUE

ON

M. RENAN'S 'VIE DE JÉSUS.'

CRITIQUE

ON

M. RENAN'S 'VIE DE JÉSUS.'*

THERE are 'Four Gospels,' we are accustomed to say,—those of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is a great mistake; for there are at least a dozen. The most wonderful have been reserved for these 'last days;' and perhaps the most wonderful of all is 'The Gospel according to M. Renan.' If true, it is a revelation indeed—a veritable Apocalypse! Founded on the main principles of Strauss, but essaying to reconstruct, after a fashion, what the German's criticism had demolished,—to give us the *positive*, as he gave us the *negative* side of Christ's true history,—this book of M. Renan deserves, if anything ever deserved, to be called 'a new Gospel.' It would be too much to say that it was constructed out of the *débris* of the evangelic history; for it is full of purely fanciful assump-

* Ernest Renan: 'Vie de Jésus.' Troisième édition. Paris: 1863.

tions, used to cement the few fragments the author arbitrarily selects from the ruins of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Indeed, this critical cement is sometimes so abundant as to give the structure the appearance of being composed as much of mortar as of stone, and suggests the idea, not incongruous, of a 'lath and plaster' building.

In truth, there is no reason in the world why we should not have a dozen or two more such 'Gospels,' if we can but meet with a dozen men with M. Renan's fancy, and what it might be more difficult to match, M. Renan's effrontery. The receipt for their concoction, *ad libitum*, may be thus briefly given. I. Assume that there never was, never will be, such a thing as a *miracle*. Now, as the Gospels are full of little else, you sponge out at once nine-tenths of the whole, and get a fair portion of blank parchment for your own incomparable *palimpsest*. II. Take the same course with prophecy; and you will immediately get rid of all facts which purport to be the *fulfilment* of prophecy. Here you have simply to contradict the narrative; and instead of saying (as the Gospels say) that the facts happened in order to fulfil the prophecy, you may say at once that the facts were invented to fulfil the prophecy. In truth, instead of having any difficulty with these supposed conformities between ancient predictions and asserted fulfilments of them, you have a simple and most infallible criterion of legendary matter; and this

again gives you a further blank space, on which to inscribe your conjectural history. III. Of the remaining facts, summarily reject any which are hopelessly implicated with the aforesaid miraculous or prophetical elements; which either originate in them, or have no significance or value if detached from them: and on the rest, which may by any possibility be severed from such inadmissible adjuncts, use, (if they present any difficulty in the way of your theory,) a little gentle violence,* alter them, disguise them, give them another time, place, and circumstance. IV. Form your own preconceptions of Christ and of the 'necessary laws of development' of such a character, and reject whatever seems to you inconsistent with those preconceptions; you may thus get rid, like M. Renan, of the 'discourses' of the evangelist John, as you have already got rid of all the miracles of all the Four. V. If you meet with a passage which, carefully strained through the critical filter, or, diligently insulated from any other passages which would explain it, seems to favour any trait in Christ which you would fain attribute to Him, (but especially if it be one of disparagement,) do not trouble yourself laboriously to collate it with any qualifying passages, nor in many cases even to cite the words; but content yourself with making a reference in the margin. With nineteen out of twenty readers, the relevancy of the passage will be assumed.

* 'Il faut les solliciter doucement,' says M. Renan, of refractory texts.

Or, if you find any alleged facts which seem to favour your own theory, assume them to be undoubted history; but if conjoined in the Gospels with others which are inconsistent with the interpretation, declare these last to be legendary additions; and though you have no reason in the world, except your own arbitrary humour, for rejecting the one as legendary and accepting the other as historic, (since both stand on the same authority,) what does that matter to one who is constructing a history of Christ on the principles of M. Renan? VI. If you find any passages, of which it is difficult to deny the substance, but inconvenient to admit the details, never forget to say that we do not know, and never can tell, the degree—always conveniently indeterminate—in which the 'legendary and mythical spirit' has transformed the original transactions. You will find this rule almost as serviceable as an absolute rejection of the passages in question; for it leaves utterly uncertain all that you wish to be so, and your fancy free as air. By these critical canons, every one of which, as we shall soon show, is exemplified by M. Renan, and the most important (the first, second, and fourth) openly avowed by him, nothing can be easier than to concoct a new account of the 'Origines du Christianisme.' Christen it,—we were going to say, but considering the derivation of the word, it would be singularly inappropriate,—entitle it, then, 'Leben Jesu' or 'Vie de

Jésus,' and it cannot fail to attract attention,—for nine days at least.

No words would suffice to express men's contempt for any biography, except that of 'Jesus Christ,' or any history, except that of the 'Origin of Christianity,' which should thus deal with the only materials from which it could be constructed; and then, having destroyed all ground and all pretence of certitude, should ask us to accept conjectural romance as historic fact! But the world has long been indulgent to the exigencies of infidelity. It *must* give some account of the 'origin of Christianity' and the position of 'Christ' in history, that shall not necessitate a belief in the literal truth of the Gospels; and M. Renan's is the most recent of about a score of such attempts. We have no doubt that it will not be the last.

We now proceed to give proofs and illustrations of the *principles* on which M. Renan has constructed his 'Life of Christ,' after having apparently demolished all the materials for it, and, spider-like, doomed himself to spin his web out of his own little stock of viscous thread. Whether his mode of accounting for those 'legendary miracles,' which form the mass of the evangelic 'Lives of Christ,' be satisfactory or intelligible; whether the Christ *he* portrays be worthy of the world's homage or of its contempt; whether, if He ever existed, He is the Christ the world has believed

in, and who—to use M. Renan's phrase—has played such a *rôle* in it; whether, in eliminating all the Supernatural, our author has not, even by his own admission, destroyed all that first gave, or still gives, to Christ His ascendancy over mankind, we shall consider afterwards.

I. Both Strauss and his French imitator affirm, as an axiom of modern science, no longer to be confuted or even doubted, the absolute *incredibility* of all supernatural phenomena,—whether in the shape of miracle or prophecy. M. Renan everywhere simply takes this for granted: he does not condescend to argue the point; he hardly seems to suppose that there are any people left in the world who still believe the contrary; he offers no reason for his opinion, except that uniform experience so rules it, (which, if applied to *all* time, is of course to beg the question,) and he answers no objections. This principle is, with him, as an axiom of mathematics; no more to be doubted or reasoned about, than that two and two make four.

The following brief extracts will suffice to show how easily M. Renan manages to eliminate the supernatural, *i. e.* all but a few pages of the documents on which he yet professes he must mainly rely for reconstructing the *true* 'Life of Christ':—

'That the Gospels are *in part* legendary is evident enough, since they are *full* of miracles and of the supernatural'! (p. xv.) In *part*!—he must mean *nine*

parts out of ten, as the after expression, '*full* of the supernatural,' would more naturally import. It is much like saying that 'oat-cake' is in part made of 'oats,' when, in fact, it is little else.

After saying that it is not possible to receive the statements of ancient authors as they stand, (and he makes plentiful use of the critical winnowing-fan,) our author observes :—'There is, above all, one class of 'narratives in relation to which this principle has a 'necessary application; that is, the narratives of the 'Supernatural. To seek to explain these narratives or to 'reduce them to legends, is not to mutilate facts in the 'name of theory. . . . None of the miracles with which 'ancient histories are filled ever took place under sci-'entific conditions.* An experience which has never

* As for M. Renan's 'scientific conditions,' as proposed by him (pp. li. lii.), they are not only perfectly arbitrary, but involve a contradiction in terms, and would simply destroy the evidence which they are laid down to determine. Whether a 'Thaumaturge' can raise the dead or not, would be determined nowadays, M. Renan thinks, by a formal 'commission of physicians, physiologists, chemists, and critics,' who are to 'choose their corpse,' appoint the place and circumstances 'of the operation, and lay down a system of precautions' to guard against imposture. Well, what then? Why, 'if the operation succeeds,' a great '*probability*' of the reality of the miracle 'will be attained.' But as there may be *some* doubt, and 'as *experience* must be always able to repeat itself,' the 'Thaumaturge' may be requested to raise *other* bodies, under *other* circumstances, and before *other* spectators' (p. lii.). That is—1. A miracle is here supposed to be in accordance with common 'experience,' inasmuch as it is supposed capable of being repeated *ad libitum*, when, by its very definition, it is *not* in such accordance; and 2. As the sceptics may require it to be *repeated* till they

'once failed, teaches us that miracles never happen 'except in times and countries where people believe 'in such things, and before persons who are disposed to 'believe in them. It is not, then, in the name of such 'or such a philosophy, it is in the name of *a constant* '*experience* that we banish miracles from history;'— which is of course to take the whole question for granted. 'We shall maintain, then, in accordance 'with the modern doctrine, this *principle* of historic 'criticism,—that a supernatural narration cannot be 'admitted as such; that it uniformly implies credulity or imposture' (pp. l.–lii.). 'The negation of a miracle '—that idea which originates in the conception of 'laws in which the personal intervention of superior 'beings has no part—was the exclusive dogma of the 'great schools of all countries that received Greek 'science. Perhaps even Babylon and Persia were 'not absolutely strangers to it. Jesus knew nothing 'of this progress. Though born in an epoch when 'the principle of *positive science* had been already pro-

are satisfied, every sceptic would naturally demand the very same evidence which has been granted to the favoured 'Commission:' that is, the evidence for the miracle would be so abundant as to destroy the miracle itself,—an 'every-day miracle' being none! But M. Renan strangely under-estimates the power of incredulity, when he imagines that his 'Commission' would cure scepticism. He forgets what Voltaire said, that 'if a hundred thousand men told him they had seen a dead man raised to life, he should say that their eyes were dazzled!'

'claimed, he lived in the full belief of the superna-
'tural. . . . . Jesus in this differed not at all from His
'compatriots. He believed in the devil, whom He
'looked upon as a sort of evil genius. . . . For *him*,
'the miraculous was not exceptional, it was the normal
'condition of things. The notion of the supernatural
'with its impossibilities appeared only in the day when
'the experimental science of nature arose' (pp. 40, 41; see also pp. 256, 257).

To these brief extracts (the italics are ours) we might append many others; but these will suffice to show how easy a time M. Renan has of it, in getting rid of the greater part of the only documents from which we can gather any but the most meagre facts about Christ. Leave these out, and all that we know, or can know, might have been stated in any ten of M. Renan's 500 pages.

Meantime, on this *soi-disant* first principle of modern 'science,' the quietly-assumed postulate of all modern infidelity,—which, if unproved, makes the whole infidel argument one vast '*petitio principii*,' and, if denied, renders the whole reasoning based upon it perfectly invalid, we offer only two or three remarks: M. Renan's discreet silence absolves us from treating it more fully.

The principle itself is nothing less than a pure fiction of modern speculation—a deduction assuming to be an universal and eternal truth, based upon a present and

transient experience! It is precisely analogous to the usual fallacy of children, who assume that there is nothing, will be nothing, and can be nothing at variance with their present experience. Now, no induction from *present* experience can, in the very nature of things, be any guarantee for the universality of the assumed conclusion; and it is sufficiently confirmed by this, that the very fact from which it is reasoned—the invariable uniformity of *present* phenomena—may be, and usually is, just as willingly conceded by those who deny the would-be *dictum*, as by those who affirm it. Further, it lacks all proof derived from any of the ordinary sources of absolute and universal certitude,—such as immediate intuition or necessary deduction from it.

Again; if we admit the universal conclusion, from the only premises adduced for it—namely, the present uniformity of phenomena—we must, by necessity of thought, either contend for that which Geology shows to be palpably false, and which not even the modern Atheist would plead for,—the Eternal Uniformity of Phenomena, the eternal succession of antecedents and consequences, just as we see them; or be brought face to face, at last, with inevitable facts, which are themselves of the nature of Miracles; and which, in spite of the sophistical evasions by which that identity may be disputed, are (and this is all that is essential to the argument) utterly destructive of the pretended *absolute uniformity* of phenomena, assumed from the

inductions of present experience. Yet this illogical deduction is the very essence and sole basis of the argument against the supernatural!

We say it matters not to the argument, whether the facts at which we at last arrive, in speculating on the origin and succession of cosmical phenomena, are affirmed to be identical with 'miracles' or not; for they equally subvert the only basis on which the asserted incredibility of *miracles throughout all time* rests. If it can be shown that we *must* admit a condition of things at *some* time, which proves that the inferences from present experience cannot be applied to it, it is clear that no such inferences will serve to prove the incredibility of miracles. In other words, if there *must* have been at some time a condition of things which transcends all present experience, it is vain to plead a pretended absolute uniformity in the past, against miracles; for that uniformity has not existed. On the other hand, if the uniformity of *present* experience is to be the absolute measure of the past, and to be applied without limit, then the world has never been other than what it is. This is what the older Atheists asserted, but which no modern Atheist, in face of the discoveries of geology and half a score of other sciences, will venture to assert any longer. The cool effrontery, full of an amusing *naïveté*, with which M. Renan and others affirm this *so-called* principle of modern science, without ever condescending to prove

it, or to reply to objections against it, shows what may be done by dint of continual iteration; for these philosophers affirm it, just as confidently as if they had proved it. Proof, however, we believe it has none.

Before quitting this subject, we may make one obvious remark:—How much more satisfactory would it be to mankind,—of how much doubt and trouble would it relieve the inquirer,—nay, how completely would it obviate the cruel necessity imposed on the architects of the infidel Babel, of reconstructing from time to time a probable Christianity out of the ruins of the only histories that tell us anything about it, if they would but demonstrate to the world's satisfaction this *one* theorem, as to the incredibility of the Supernatural;—which, instead of demonstrating, they eternally take for granted! Since the Gospels (as they stand) are confessedly a supernatural history; since they are filled from beginning to end with prophecy and miracle; since Christianity is professedly based upon these, and built up of them, from foundation-stone to pinnacle, nine-tenths of the entire Gospels would be thereby demolished at once. By the admission of this same pregnant principle of criticism, nine-tenths of the remainder would be so damaged by implication with the rejected materials, that it would seem as hopeless to contend about the small residuum of possible fact (except as a pastime for the idlest literary

curiosity), as to write formal dissertations about how much truth may remain in 'The Arabian Nights' when the legendary and fictitious matter is all cancelled! If such an immense preponderance of the whole materials of the Gospels is to be dismissed as legendary and fictitious, and if, as is plainly the consequence, the character and complexion of the remainder be essentially affected,—much made obviously false, much utterly without meaning, and *all*, by the very supposition uncertain,—it seems clearly impossible that any criticism should tell us how much, or rather how little, of that small remainder is true;—a fact the less to be regretted, since it would most likely be utterly insignificant, except as matter of curiosity; whether it were true or not. When a man has been told a hundred things of which ninety—and those by far the most momentous—are demonstrably false, and half the remainder utterly disguised by the contagious falsehood in contact with it, he would naturally think, first, that it was quite impossible to say what infinitesimal atoms of truth might remain in the last fraction, and, secondly, that, if it could be ascertained, it was hardly worth spending one's life about!

Men would doubtless still discuss the 'Origines du Christianisme' (for Christianity exists, let it have arisen out of what it will and when it will) as a very curious phenomenon; but it would be with an enviably unbiassed and unsolicitous mind, with a truly philosophic

sang froid, or with that otiose air and languid interest with which they discuss *which* of the seven cities had the honour of giving birth to Homer, or whether the amount of history which underlies the Iliad be two, or two and a half, per cent. ! It is in truth much such a discussion to which Strauss's and Renan's books reduce the Gospels.

Now we do think it rather hard that these critics do not abridge the process, and the world's suspense at the same time, by simply and clearly demonstrating the incredibility *per se* of ninety-nine out of every hundred of the statements which the Gospels contain. In that case the tremors of the world on the subject would be hushed at once and for ever; it would be very well content either to leave absolutely undetermined, because practically of little moment, the tatters of historic truth that may still flutter about the Gospel when all the supernatural elements have been forcibly torn away, or leave them to antiquarian quidnuncs to wrangle about in their books of Evangelic archæology to their heart's content.

It may perhaps be grandiloquently said, 'But is not the Truth the Truth?' Certainly: nevertheless, men will, both in the solicitude with which they investigate it, and the degree of trouble they will take about it, always look to the *relative* value of it, and its supposed consequences and implications. It is true, or not, that the Argonauts sailed to Colchis, though we may doubt

whether it was for the *legendary* 'Golden Fleece;' and true, or not, that the abduction of Helen was the cause of the Trojan war: but the world will not eat the less heartily, or sleep the less soundly, whichever side of the alternative be taken. Nor do the sceptics who adopt the important *negative* on such shadowy subjects, exhibit a tenth of the eagerness or endure a hundredth part of the immeasurable toil in making out their point, as our infidels of another description, in constructing their fabulous histories of Christianity! And, in truth, the voluminous labours, 'ever ending, still beginning,' of our older Deists and our modern Rationalists—of our Strausses and our Renans—would seem to indicate that there is more in the affair than appears; and that the commodious and succinct way of setting the main questions at rest,—and of giving the world peace,—namely, by proving the Supernatural (miracles and prophecy alike), to be absolutely incredible, is not so easy as at first sight might be supposed. Considering how many millions are looking at the problem in a totally different mood from M. Renan; how many still live in the firm belief of the supernatural history of the Gospel; how many aspire, with fallacious hopes, to its visionary heaven; how many dread, with, it seems, equal folly, its visionary hell; we know not how to acquit Messrs. Strauss and Renan and other infidels of much blame, and great inhumanity, for not at once disabusing them of their dream, by

just demonstrating once, what they assert a thousand times, that all the hopes and fears suspended on the supernatural are altogether fantastical and self-created.

II. We proceed to illustrate the second principle in virtue of which M. Renan finds it so easy a task to write a 'Life of Christ.'

M. Renan's theory, rejecting, as it does, all the 'miraculous' in the history of Christ as absolutely legendary, also rejects (in that, too, following Strauss) everything that implies *prophecy*. He thinks, like the German critic, that much, very much, of the 'legend' was suggested and received in virtue of the ancient Messianic expectations cherished by the Jews; but that the facts were invented to suit the prophecy, not that they occurred in fulfilment of it.

'Many anecdotes,' says our author (p. xlvi.), 'were '*imagined* in order to prove that in Him the prophecies 'regarded as Messianic had their accomplishment. . . 'Sometimes the writers reason thus: "The Messiah '"*ought* to do such a thing; now Jesus is the Messiah; '"therefore he has done it." Sometimes they reason 'inversely: "Such a thing has happened to Jesus; '"now Jesus is the Messiah; then such a thing was '"to happen to the Messiah."' How many difficult passages may these pregnant principles—at the simple cost of supposing all the early disciples of Christ utter fools—not simply blot out, but convert into material

for an entirely new version of the 'Vie de Jésus!' The *historian's* materials, it is true, become scanty enough; but those of romance are indefinitely increased.

And as the theory is the same with that of Strauss, so the objections to it are the same.

1st. It is not easy to account even for the *existence* of any such Messianic expectations, on any theory propounded by these writers. If alleged prophecy, indeed, not only existed, but when given was sustained by the proofs of a due authority to utter it, all becomes plain; but on their hypothesis, it is not obvious how the Jewish nation, considering their numerical insignificance and depressed political condition, should spontaneously rise to the audacious conception that from *them* should arise an all-conquering Messiah, who should subject the whole world to his sceptre and make the Jews supreme among the nations! That some such expectation pervaded the East, we know from express testimonies of heathen writers—Tacitus and Suetonius, for example; it was certainly cherished with the utmost intensity by the Jews. But, 2ndly, such a theory as that of Strauss and Renan is much more incomprehensible, when we reflect that the history of Christ, as the Messiah, in no way *tallies* with the national Jewish preconceptions! Nothing can be plainer than that the *species* of Messiah the Jews looked for and longed for, was the very *opposite* of Christ; nothing plainer

than that for that very reason, they did not *accept*, but all but unanimously rejected, and at last crucified Him. If the theory were true, the Legends of Christ's 'Life' ought to have corresponded to the ideal of the nation's interpretation of the ancient oracles. On the other hand, the Gentiles ought to have *rejected* Him, whether His pretensions tallied with ancient prophecy or not; for no myths of the coming 'Messiah' could be acceptable to *them*, or find one *point d'appui* in the whole circle of their habits, notions, or prepossessions.

All their prepossessions, negative and positive,—their hatred and contempt of the Jewish nation and all that appertained to it, and their attachment to their own varied and ancient systems of superstition,—were diametrically opposed to Christ and His claims. Whether the Jews interpreted their ancient prophecies truly or falsely, Greeks, Romans, and Barbarians must have been equally incredulous as to every 'Messianic myth;' they would not only have denied with the Pharisee that 'anything good could come out of Nazareth,' but against the Pharisee, that anything good could come out of Palestine!

How stand the facts? By the Jews, in harmony with whose *prejudices* it is supposed Christ preferred His claims, this Messiah was openly rejected; and, during nearly nineteen centuries, they have as a nation been true to the instincts which told their ancestors that *He* was not the Messiah they wished or looked

for, or (as they believed) had been promised. On the other hand, multitudes of the Gentiles, of the most various races and nations, who could have no prepossessions in favour of any Jewish Messiah whatever—and least of all for one whose origin was so mean, whose doctrines were so unpalatable to the whole heathen mind, and who had been crucified as a malefactor—madly accepted Him; and in a comparatively short time admitted His 'Messianic' claims so widely, that His disciples were found in every province of the Roman Empire! In short, it seems the national *prepossessions* of the Jews led them to reject the Messiah, who, according to the theory, was the *object* of their national prepossessions; while the Gentiles, who had *no* prepossessions for Him, and many against Him, gave Him a blind preference over the gods for which they had all sorts of prepossessions; abandoned, for His sake, the most various forms of venerable idolatry, suffered Him to usurp the temples of the whole brood of Olympus, and to push Jupiter and all his minions from their ancient thrones! Is it credible that this general rejection of the pretended Messiah on the part of the only people that was, on this theory, *likely* to accept Him, and this ready acceptance of Him on the part of the many races who were, *à priori*, certain to reject Him, can be accounted for by antecedent conditions of mind, either on the one part or the other? Is not the whole theory not only *not* consistent with the facts, but

in the direct teeth of them all? Must we not say that, whatever becomes of other theories, this, at any rate, *must* be false; and that, if we believe it, we must do so for Tertullian's paradoxical reason—'*because* it is impossible?' For the theory inverts every one of the facts, and confutes itself.

And what remains, then, on M. Renan's hypothesis, to *account* for the acceptance of this Messiah where we might have expected His rejection, any more than His rejection where we might have expected His acceptance? Nothing in the world, but certain most gross legends in which a few illiterate Jews—ignorant adherents of this obscure and most unwelcome Messiah—chose to invest, or rather utterly to disguise and travesty, His real history. Ignorant and illiterate as they were, however, they have managed to do this thing in such a way, with such transcendant beauty of form and colouring, as to deceive the nations into the belief of the historic truth of what is, after all, but a collection of the most egregiously idle legends!

Strangest of all—though incontrovertibly proving the strength of Jewish prepossessions in the *contrary* direction to that required by M. Renan's theory—the Jews generally admitted the miraculous *facts* of this 'legendary' history, though even that conviction did not overcome their enmity to Christ,—showing their rooted and invincible antipathy to any *such* Messiah, His contrariety to all their preconceived notions as to what

the Messiah would be and must be. Not even the 'glorifying myth,' which, it seems, so readily imposed upon the world at large, and even, in great part, compelled the assent of the Jew himself to it as a narrative of supernatural facts, could master his reluctance to accept such a Messiah as this, in lieu of Him whom his fancy and prepossessions had painted as an all-conquering King, invested with the external insignia of majesty, achieving universal empire, and exalting the Jews to the pinnacle of greatness!

Until, then, it can be fully made out how, in virtue of his *prepossessions*, the Jew came to reject the object of his hopes, and the Gentile to accept the object of his antipathies, we must reject this theory: and in spite of Strauss and M. Renan, the question is as pertinent as ever,—How came the world, not in consequence of its prepossessions, but in manifest contradiction to them all, not only to accept the most monstrous legends (for, if legendary at all, the Gospel narrative is the most monstrous that ever entered a romancer's brains) as true history; and not only to accept them, but at what a cost!—to exchange the indulgent, easy-going, latitudinarian systems—the merry, festal heathenism then in fashion—for a religion the doctrines of which were so humbling, the morals so austere, the self-denial so hard, the persecutions so certain;—promising a heaven so dismantled of all that made Elysium inviting, and threatening a hell so much more

terrible than Tartarus? What could be the allurements sufficient to overcome the natural recoil from such legends as those with which Strauss and Renan believe the early disciples of Christ to have embellished, or, rather, to have utterly obscured and transfigured, the real history of their Master? How, indeed, illiterate Jews *could* fabricate such legends as those of the Gospels,—how they could so paint as to impose on the world the wildest day-dreams as history,—in spite both of the notorious absence of the alleged facts and every species of moral repugnance to such a religion as they propounded,—our author wisely refrains from inquiring. Yet it is worthy of investigation; for, assuredly, there is many a man who can more easily believe the entire history of Christ to be true than that the Christ of the Gospels is the pure production of the native genius of Galilean fishermen and peasants, whether we look at the difficulties from an intellectual, moral, or spiritual point of view. Folks in general strongly hold with Rousseau's 'Savoyard Pastor,' that if the portrait of Christ be not from the life, the painters of the Gospel must have been still more wonderful than its 'Hero.'

III. Having got rid, by one summary, comprehensive assumption, of the whole supernatural elements of the Gospels, M. Renan by no means stops there. He rejects a great deal more that is *not* supernatural; and then, out of the infinitesimal relics, proceeds to

build his fancy edifice. The reason for which he rejects much that is *non-miraculous* is obvious enough; he feels that it is too vitally implicated with the primitive character of the old Gospels to be retained. The stones are so squared and chiselled (so to speak) as to fit into the original structure, and into that alone. A large part, therefore, of the ordinary history he simply rejects, just as he does miracles and prophecy; what he retains he deals with much as he pleases,—altering, dislocating, misinterpreting, taking the literal metaphorically, and the metaphorical literally, as best suits his purpose. The few stones which he chooses for his new fabric are new wrought; their angles rounded off, their ornaments chipped away, their position inverted, the figures or characters inscribed on them effaced, as the exigencies of the new architect may require. The whole process resembles nothing so much as what is sometimes seen when the venerable ruins of some ancient castle or monastery have been resorted to, as a quarry, whence to select the materials for some peasant's cottage. A few of the stones are selected from the ancient pile, chipped and rough-hewn as fancy pleases, placed in any position,—the old face in, or the old face out,—just as happens. The result is a tenement very small, very dark, very clumsy, very smoky, and about as like the original, from which the materials have been in part supplied, as a hovel is like a palace.

An amusing specimen of the way in which the dire exigencies of his main principle,—the utter extrusion of the supernatural in all its forms, and all that is implicated with it,—compel M. Renan to deal with his materials, will be found in his account of the relations between Christ and John the Baptist. The reader will there see that there is hardly a fact in the Gospels that is not denied, inverted, or perverted, just to suit the necessities of our new *rédacteur* of the Evangelic history. The Gospel says that John came to 'prepare the way of the Lord, and to make straight his paths;' —M. Renan says that Christ's 'relations with John rather made the young prophet of Nazareth *deviate* from his course,' though Christ '*borrowed* some important accessories of his religious system' from him. The Evangelist says that John preached 'repentance, and works meet for repentance.' M. Renan says that he does not seem to have had, even in germ, the grand idea which constitutes the triumph of Jesus—'the idea of a pure religion' (p. 103). The Evangelists say that Christ had not entered on His public work till *after* His baptism by John; M. Renan says that He *had*, for John at once recognised Him and bade Him welcome (pp. 104–5). Of course this is said to obviate that special *revelation* of the person of the Messiah to John on which the Evangelist insists; though why M. Renan, while he was about it, did not deny (which he might just as easily do) the statement that John *did*

at once recognise Jesus, it may be hard for M. Renan to say.—The Gospel says that John declared himself unworthy to baptize Christ, that he 'needed rather to be baptized by him.' M. Renan says that, there being no great difference in the age of the 'two young enthusiasts,' John, recognising in Christ 'a spirit analogous to his own, received him without any personal *arrière pensée*' (p. 106).—John again and again acknowledged the immeasurable superiority of Christ, whose 'shoe's latchet he was not worthy to unloose;' M. Renan says that Jesus acknowledged *John's* superiority during the whole time He was with him, and 'developed his own genius with timidity;' that 'for some weeks or months, Jesus, in spite of his profound originality, was the *imitator* of John' (p. 107);* that the 'superiority of John was too undisputed for Christ (still but little known) to dream of contesting it' (p. 108). And so on to the end of the chapter of Christ's 'relations' to the Baptist.

With examples of this convenient method of inverting the Gospel history, we might fill scores of pages. The Gospel gives us to understand that Jesus recognised Nathaniel and Peter, and knew the previous history of the Samaritan woman, in virtue of His

* On the same page, M. Renan thus generalises this statement—though on what he founds the charge it is difficult to say:—'Jesus,' he tells us, 'through his whole course yielded much to opinion, and adopted many things that were not *in his way*, or for which he cared little, because they were *popular*!'

preternatural insight. Of course, this must be got rid of, no matter at what cost to the character of Christ; and so M. Renan tells us,—'That Jesus sometimes made use of an *innocent* (!) artifice, which Joan of Arc also employed. He affected to know some secrets of those he wished to gain, or rather he recalled to them some circumstance dear to their heart. It is thus that he touched Nathaniel, Peter, the Samaritan woman. *Dissembling* the true cause of his power, he let it be believed, just to satisfy the notions of the time (which he in general fully shared), that a revelation from on high had disclosed to him their secrets, and opened their hearts to him' (p. 162).

Whether it became a teacher of TRUTH thus to 'humour the times,' and obtain credit for what he was not, the reader will decide for himself. That M. Renan should speak of Christ in terms of admiration, little short of adoration, while he freely imputes to Him such unworthy traits, too surely reveals his own moral position. His ideal of excellence can hardly be a very elevated one. Meanwhile his damaging criticisms neutralise his magniloquent eulogies of Christ, and leave that 'purple robe' (with which, like more ancient mockers, M. Renan sometimes clothes Him) all in tatters. But more of this by and by.

IV. It was observed that resolute *preconceptions* of the character of Christ will enable such a critic as our author, either to expunge a great part of the Evange-

lical materials, or reduce their value to zero. It is thus that, by one masterly stroke, M. Renan gets rid of the 'Discourses' of the fourth Evangelist, as easily as, on another account, he does of the miracles of all the four. Conformably with the 'necessary laws' of Christ's development, according to M. Renan, it is, of course, impossible that He should have talked so much orthodox theology as John has recorded; and He must be saved from that imputation, though the unlucky John, in the critical struggle, should go to the bottom. In fact, M. Renan's account of John and his gospel deserves of itself to be called a special revelation, at utter variance in sundry points to the elder 'apocalypse' of Strauss. It seems that John, so far from deserving to be the 'beloved' disciple, must have been very much the reverse. According to M. Renan, he was, in his old age, very angry that more prominence had not been given to him in the other gospels; and so took care to give the world before he left it, a 'gospel' of his own, in which he should make a better figure (p. xxviii.). 'After the death of James, his brother John remained the sole heir of those intimate "souvenirs" of which these two apostles, by the confession of all, were the depositaries' (*ibid.*). Now *how* he uses these 'memories' our author gives us a very distinct idea: 'When an old man,' says he, 'John composed this absurd (*bizarre*) gospel on his master,

which yet contains such precious information,* but in which, in our judgment, the character of Jesus is, upon many points, falsified. The nature of John was too vigorous and too profound to bend itself to the impersonal tone of the first Evangelists. He was such a biographer of Jesus as Plato was of Socrates. Accustomed to revolve his remembrances with the feverish restlessness of an enthusiastic soul, he *transformed* his Master while he endeavoured to paint him,'—(considering M. Renan's own transformations, we must say he is rather hard on John),—'and sometimes gives us reason to suspect (unless other hands have tampered with his work), that a perfect good faith was not always his rule and law in the composition of this singular writing' (pp. 156–7). Poor John! with bad memory, and bad faith, and '*inquiétude fébrile*,' much jealousy, and irritable vanity, no wonder that he wrote what we cannot rely upon. In order to make the confusion of this gospel still greater, M. Renan, in the preceding page, resolves the above *doubt*, and thinks that 'the school of John *did* retouch his gospel after him.' The only wonder is that M. Renan should be able, with infallible instinct, to pick out from this 'Évangile bizarre' the 'precious information' which, he says, it

* How we can know whether there be any 'precious information,' or, if there be, what it is, assuming M. Renan's view of the contents of this gospel and the character of its author to be correct, we are not told.

contains; but he does so upon the same perfectly arbitrary principles of which we have said so much; that is, he takes what pleases him, and leaves what pleases him not. But, strangely enough, *that* is sure to please him which can in any way be represented as diminishing the grandeur of the 'Sublime Personage' he avows such profound admiration of!

V. A single passage, though the interpretation be ever so inconsistent with the plain meaning of others, and imperatively needing to be compared with them, is often relied upon *alone*; even that one is often not cited, but a simple reference made to it in the margin. In other cases, a statement is made on the mere faith of this convenient 'fallacy of reference' (as Whately would call it), though, on turning to the passage, one finds it utterly impossible to see the relevance of the citation. In other cases, a damaging trait (as it is made to appear) is, without scruple, taken from an insulated passage of one or other of the Evangelists, though all the circumstances that introduce, accompany, and explain it, are disregarded as plainly *unhistoric*. Why our author should suppose he can implicitly depend on one statement, while he rejects all the rest that are implicated with it, or explanatory of it, does not appear; unless we are to assume, as a canon of his criticism, that any incident or trait that can be turned to the discredit of Christ is undoubted history, whatever else be rejected as 'mythical.' We

proceed, as before, to adduce some few examples of these allegations.*

* It may be as well to subjoin a few specimens—they might be indefinitely increased—of the reckless way in which M. Renan manipulates with his authorities. He never, or very rarely indeed, quotes the words of the Evangelists, but contents himself with a reference in his foot-notes; and the reader on turning to the passages is (more often than not) astonished to find that they are either utterly irrelevant, or adverse, or perverted in M. Renan's text from their true meaning. Scores of these pretended references no more sustain our critic's crazy inference from them, than the words, 'Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah,' will serve to prove the doctrine of Transubstantiation. He is as absurd as the good Catholic who proved the duty of 'worshipping the saints' by the text 'wherein it is written, God is wonderful in all his works.' We shall exhibit the statements and the references in parallel columns—merely, of course, adding to the last, what M. Renan has taken care to omit—the passage as well as the reference. It is sometimes hard to imagine that he had any particular passage in view, and that he did not insert references haphazard, just as they came into his head. The few examples we have thought it worth while to give are all from the first forty pages of the 'Introduction.' But they are to be found throughout the book. So shamelessly, indeed, is this trick resorted to, that we are not sure it would not be one of the best modes of refutating M. Renan, to print his text in one column, and his authorities from the Gospels in full, in another.

Statements.	*Authorities.*
The apocryphal book of 'Henoch, in particular, which was much read among those who surrounded Jesus, gives the key to the expression "Son of Man."' P. xi.	Jude 14. 'And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints.'
That Luke 'softens details in the attempt to bring about an agreement between different accounts.'—P. xxxix.	Luke iv. 16. 'And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on

The Gospel tells us that 'Jesus was subject to his parents.' M. Renan says that the legend is pleased

Statements.	*Authorities.*
	the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.'
That Luke was 'a most punctilious devotee.'—P. xl.	Luke xxiii. 56. 'And they (the women) returned and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.'
That Luke is 'utterly ignorant of Hebrew.'—*Ibid.*	Compare i. 31 (the angel to Mary), 'And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus,' with Matt. i. (the angel to Joseph), 'And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.'
That Luke 'exaggerates the marvellous.'—P. xl.	Luke iv. 14; xxii. 43, 44. 'And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.' 'And there appeared an angel to him from heaven, strengthening him.' [It is hard to say how, in these cases, Luke '*exaggerates* the marvellous' any more than the other Evangelists in many other cases. If, as M. Renan thinks, *all* the miraculous narratives are false, it is certain that all the Four have 'exaggerated the marvellous' to a sufficient degree to make the charge against any one of them

to exhibit Him 'from his infancy in revolt against paternal authority,' and refers to Luke ii. 42, and fol-

Statements.	*Authorities.*
	ridiculous. No critical hound has a scent keen enough to detect such traits, except M. Renan.]
John 'on every page betrays his intention of strengthening his own authority, and of showing that he was the favourite of Jesus.' P. xxvii.	John xiii. 23; xix. 26; xx. 2; xxi. 7, 20; *i.e.* all the passages in which John (without mentioning his own name, however) uses the expression 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'!
That the relations between John and Peter, though generally fraternal, did not exclude a certain rivalry on the part of John with Peter. *Ibid.*	John xviii. 15, 16. 'And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. 'But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.'
And that John, 'mortified at seeing that the earlier writers had not granted him a sufficiently grand place in the history of Christ, began to dictate a crowd of incidents which he was better acquainted with than the others, with the *intention* of showing that in very many cases, where the preceding accounts spoke only of Peter, he (John) had made a figure both with and before him.' P. xxviii.	John xx. 4-6. 'So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. 'And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. 'Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie.'

lowing verses ;—in which passage, nevertheless, the very correction of any such interpretation is given ! 'It is certain, at all events,' says M. Renan, 'that the parental relations were of very little consequence to him.' The above-cited passage and the scene at the Cross sufficiently absolve him from this charge. However, according to our author, Christ only treated His

Statements.	*Authorities.*
	John xxi. 15-19. *I.e.* John's exquisitely tender account of our Lord's thrice repeated questions —'Lovest thou me?' (p. xxxii.) The author says, however, that chap. xxi. is an afterthought, in which the author proposed to do *honour* to Peter after that apostle's death!
That John 'had a personal hatred of Judas, a hatred that dated probably from before his treason.'—*Ibid.*	John vii. 64. 'For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.'
	John xii. 6. 'This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bore what was put therein.'
	John xiii. 21. The account of what transpired at the Supper. [As all the *synoptists* give the same account of the abhorred act of Judas, and moreover add the 'woe' pronounced by Christ, which John spares, it seems whimsical to hear M. Renan finding in John's narrative a special and ancient grudge against the traitor.]

parents as He did everyone else. 'Jesus,' he says, 'like all men exclusively occupied with *an idea*, took little account of the ties of blood.'

Again; M. Renan wishes to show that Jesus was a *communist*. Nothing so easy. 'Community of goods was for some time the rule of the new society. Avarice was the capital sin. Now it is necessary *particularly to remark* that the sin of "*avarice*," against which Christian morality was so severe, was simple attachment to property. In order to be a disciple of Jesus, the first condition was that a man should sell all his property and give it to the poor. Those who recoiled from this extremity were not admitted into the community' (p. 173). Whether M. Renan's eulogies of Christ are worth anything, when, according to him, so many absurdities attach to his teaching, we shall consider by and by. We merely remark here, that he has chosen to ignore all the passages which distinctly show that this interpretation is absurd. He has, indeed, paraded three references in the margin, as if to confirm it; but all the three refer to the same *identical incident* as given by the three synoptists; namely, the story of the rich young man who, in his self-righteous confidence of having 'kept the commandments,' challenged the uttermost proof of his willingness to subject himself to any conditions in order to 'obtain eternal life.' The three references, therefore, thus paraded, are but one and the same witness, going out at one door and

in at another. Meantime, M. Renan utterly ignores the many passages in which it is clear that Christ did *not* enjoin community of property on His followers. In the Gospels themselves Christ everywhere supposes that there will *always* be the poor, and enjoins the rich to remember them accordingly. He does not contemplate the day when there would be 'neither rich nor poor,'—as there would *not* be, on the supposition of an absolute community of property; he acquiesces in Zaccheus' giving *half* his goods to feed the poor, as a fruit of repentance and token of sincerity, and does *not* tell him he must surrender the whole. The rich Joseph of Arimathea was still rich after the crucifixion. Martha was anxious to make Him a sumptuous feast; but, though He chides her too busy cares, He does *not* chide her for wasting the common fund. In no case did He lay down this surrender of property as a condition of becoming a disciple.

M. Renan will perhaps reply: But Zaccheus, Joseph of Arimathea, and who can tell how many more of them, and of the things attributed to them, are probably *mythical* and *legendary*. And we reply: Who shall assure us, then, that the texts which seem to M. Renan to prove that Christ taught 'communism' are the only things relating to the subject that are *not* legendary? Why should he not take both or neither? Why, above all, should he in this, as in so many instances, take just the passages which damage the reputation for wisdom,

and even common sense, of that very 'Jesus' whom he affects so intensely to admire?

Similar observations apply to his treatment of the passages in which he pretends to find that it is the poor *as such*, not 'the poor in spirit,' that are 'the children of the kingdom;' and the rich *as such*, not the wicked rich, that are excluded from it. He professes to discover this in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. 'This,' says M. Renan, 'was called at a later day the parable of "Le Mauvais Riche;" but it is simply "the parable of the Rich Man." He is in hell because he is rich, because he does not give his goods to the poor, because he dines comfortably,—while others at his gates dine ill' (p. 175).

We suppose few readers ever doubted that it is because the rich man gave *no* portion of his goods to feed the poor—because he was a 'Sir Giles Overreach,' and not because he did not become a 'communist'—that he is punished. Our author endeavours to strain the parable of 'the Unjust Steward,' which he calls "bizarre," into implying the same doctrine by an interpretation infinitely more 'bizarre.'*

* Of this incomparable specimen of M. Renan's exegesis we must not deprive the reader:—'Sometimes the Master, more versed in the things of heaven than in those of earth, teaches a political economy more singular still. In an absurd parable, a steward is praised for having made friends among the poor, at the expense of his master, in order that the *poor*, in their turn, may introduce him into the "kingdom of heaven." The poor, in effect, as being *the dispensers of this*

But, while thus representing Christ as blessing the poor *as such*, and cursing the rich *as such*, he finds that, 'in moments less exaggerated,' Christ 'only enjoined the surrender of property as a *counsel of perfection*; and here come in again his 'three witnesses' made out of one; *i. e.*, the instance of the 'rich young man;'—a case which it is a pity our author did not previously find might be thus limited.

Christ, then, it seems, blessed the poor *as such*, and condemned the rich *as such*, and so long as they persisted in being so. Now, we do not here ask (what we shall consider presently) what is the bearing of all this on M. Renan's eulogies of Christ (for if it be true, Christ was no moral teacher at all, but utterly confounded *all* moral distinctions, and was either the most silly or the most wicked of masters): but we want to know how it is that M. Renan does not compare the passages he thus perverts with those in which it is made as plain as daylight that our Lord makes everything depend on moral distinctions? How is it he does not quote the words (he can quote them perversely enough when he wants to show that Christ did not care a whit about kith or kin or any 'ties of blood') in which He

kingdom, will receive into it only those who shall have given to them. A man well advised, thinking of the future, ought then to try to gain their good word' (p. 174). Did any mortal man, before M. Renan, imagine that this is the meaning of the parable? Often as it has been misinterpreted and perverted, no critic has approached the eccentric absurdity of this comment.

tells us that He knows no disciple but him 'who doeth the will of God,' and that every such disciple is to Him as 'mother, sister, brother?'

If M. Renan says that these passages are all legendary, how shall we know that those he selects are not legendary also?

Again, our author says, 'The scene in Gethsemane, in harmony with that *instinctive art* which has presided over the editing of the synoptists, has been referred to the last night of Christ's life, and to the moment of his arrest.' He doubts if that representation be true to fact, because *John* does 'not enter into the same details,' (p. 378).

Why, after having dealt with John as he has, should he wonder at John's omission of anything? Yet he can here, as elsewhere, without a reason, prefer his authority to that of the three synoptists.

Once more; all the Evangelists agree that the 'last supper' included a special rite instituted on the night of the arrest. M. Renan thinks that it was simply such a meal as Christ had often taken with His disciples before; that, apart from Christ's apprehensions, which Christ imperfectly imparted and His disciples 'did not half comprehend, nothing extraordinary passed;' and that all the solemn significance which was afterwards attached to the 'supper' is the work of legend.

In short, there is no end of the instances that might be adduced of the perfectly arbitrary way in which M. Renan deals with his materials,—accepting and reject-

ing just at his pleasure. We are now speaking, be it observed, of ordinary facts, and not of the miraculous. If M. Renan says that he accepts one fact as historic, and rejects another because legendary, then, as we have so often said, how can he tell that both are not so? We repeat that we are utterly unable to perceive any principle of selection in our author's method; perhaps the one that would seem most intelligible is, that if M. Renan finds anything unfavourable to the Christ he professes to idolise, he is warranted to take that as probably historic.

VI. Of the sixth and last rule, we need hardly cite instances; they are of perpetual occurrence. For example: 'The question is insoluble, owing to the contradictions of the documents, and the little care which the Evangelist took to be exact in such matters!' Luke 'softens details, in the attempt to bring about a conciliation of different recitals;' he 'softens passages which might become embarrassing.' 'Many of the details of the recital (Luke i.), and, notably, what concerns the relationship of John the Baptist with Jesus, may be legendary.' 'The parenthetical verse (John iv. 2) may be a gloss added, or a later scruple of John correcting himself;'—no reason being assigned for either one or the other! Such expressions as these are continually occurring, and, in point of fact, give all sorts of licence to this 'chartered libertine' of history.

We must not close this part of our subject without giving two or three specimens of the way in which M.

Renan can soar above all documents, and give us pure unadulterated fancies as facts. He tells us (p. 155) that Peter, James, and John 'formed a sort of secret committee which Jesus calls together at certain moments, when he *distrusted the faith and intelligence of the other disciples*.' Where he learned that *that* was the reason of the 'committee' is known only to M. Renan. —He tells us that Christ 'was no spiritualist, and had not the smallest notion of a soul separated from a body.'* (p. 128); 'that he had no idea of civil government; that it appeared to him simply an abuse' (p. 127); 'every magistrate appeared to him a natural enemy of the people of God' (*ibid.*); that, contrary to all tradition, he 'was unquestionably' a very *handsome* man; that this was a very important element of his influence; and that "par sa beauté pure et douce, il calma cette organisation troublée" of Mary Magdalen (p. 152). The Gospel, indeed, says, in its rough and unceremonious way, that 'Jesus cast seven devils out of her,' which our theological euphuist (whose style, to speak truth, is as different from that of the gospels as the sickly atmosphere of a perfumer's shop from the mountain air) says, '*meant* that she was affected by nervous maladies.'— He tells us that Jesus, 'knowing nothing of the power of the Roman Empire,' may at first have speculated as to whether He should attempt to establish the 'king-

* In the face of the words, 'Fear not those who kill the body, and cannot kill the soul.'

dom of God by violence or by gentleness, by revolt or by patience.' 'It *may* be," he says, 'that Jesus may have often revolved this question in the earlier period of his career, and *may* have been saved from it by seeing the disastrous issue of the insurrection of Judah the Gaulonite, whom he *may* have seen.' In short, his statement is a whole *sorites* of 'peradventures,' without one iota of evidence for any one of them, and proving only that anything 'may be,' sooner than that M. Renan should learn the difference between fancy and history.

He tells us, p. 316 : 'Sometimes, one is tempted to think that Jesus, seeing in his own death a means of founding his kingdom, conceived a deliberate design of *committing suicide*,' though how this would have tended to secure the result, M. Renan forgets to explain. 'Sometimes,' he says (speaking of the closing days of Christ's life and 'the frightful progress of his enthusiasm'), 'one would have said that he was out of his senses. The grand vision of the kingdom of God, always flaming before his eyes, turned his head' (p. 318).

The account of the raising of Lazarus is a pure fancy-piece, from beginning to end; not a fact, nor the shadow of a fact, in the slightest degree sustains it. M. Renan thinks that the *peculiarities* of the narrative forbid us to suppose that 'this prodigy was one of the miracles *completely* legendary; that *something* took

place at Bethany, which was regarded as a resurrection.' He thinks that Lazarus was ill, that his sisters sent for Jesus, and that Jesus came; that the 'joy of his coming' was such a cordial to Lazarus, that he was soon on the road to health. 'Perhaps,' says M. Renan, 'the ardent desire of closing the mouth of those who outrageously denied the Divine mission of their friend, led on these enthusiastic people beyond all bounds;' and so, with another 'perhaps,' he supposes that, with Lazarus' consent, his sisters may have popped him, 'still pale from sickness, and in his grave-clothes, into the family vault.' He further supposes that Jesus may have desired to have a last look at the friend He had loved in life; and so when the 'stone was taken away,' Lazarus walked out! Thus, according to this new version of the affair, Jesus may have been *tricked*, as it were, into this pretended miracle, while only 'Lazarus and his sisters' were responsible for the 'pious fraud.' M. Renan does not, however, make the matter quite clear; for he says, 'As for Jesus, he was not always able, any more than St. Bernard or St. Francis d'Assisi, to *moderate* the avidity of the crowd, and of his own disciples, for the marvellous' (pp. 361-2). Such are specimens of M. Renan's licence of conjecture, in transforming and supplementing the Gospel narratives!

In short, having reduced the Gospels to death's door by his powerful drastic principle 'that there can be no supernatural,' he still finds them, though reduced at

most to half a dozen chapters each, too corpulent for his purpose; and like Dr. Sangrado, when his patient is half dead with depletion and inanition, still calls for more bleeding, purging, and hot water. When at length the Gospel narrative is reduced to skin and bones, all but of ghostly proportions and *in articulo mortis*, he clothes again his skeleton with some semblance of flesh by magical rites of exegesis, and convulses it into a galvanic life by arts of historic necromancy.

But now, the first and last question which would naturally be suggested by such a style of criticism is this:—If a man rejects ninety-nine hundredths of an ancient document at one fell swoop as utterly incredible; and alters, inverts, rejects, and substitutes at pleasure, in the remaining hundredth, what proof can he give us that his version of the facts is history at all? Must we not tell M. Renan, that though he scorns 'prophecy,' it is evident he holds by 'divination?' Plainly, if we regard the *only* documents which profess to hand down to us any remote transaction as incredible for the most part, and dubious and uncertain for the remainder, we ought simply to say that we know nothing about it, and be content to remain in ignorance. To reconstruct the history by mere fancy and conjecture, which is what M. Renan attempts in this romance, under the ambitious title of 'Vie de Jésus,' is grotesquely ridiculous.

It is in vain, therefore, that M. Renan puts such pretended parallels as the following :—

'Suppose, ten or twelve years ago, three or four old soldiers of the Empire had set themselves to write the life of Napoleon from their own memories. It is clear that their recital would present numerous errors, strong discrepancies. One of them would put Wagram before Marengo ; another would say without hesitation that Napoleon chased from the Tuileries the Government of Robespierre ; a third would omit expeditions of the highest importance ; but one thing would certainly result with a high degree of truth ; and that is, the character of the *hero*, the impression he made on those about him. In this sense such popular histories are worth more than ordinary history ; we may say as much for the Gospels' (pp. 44, 45).

The pretended parallel is altogether illusory ; for everything in such a case depends on the amount of legendary and dubious matter that is to be rejected, and the amount of facts to be retained.

The true parallel would be, to suppose that the presumed *histories* of Napoleon are such, that in *all* of them nine facts out of ten, and those the most important, are to be rejected at once, as *per se* incredible ; that the battles of Marengo and Wagram never took place at all, or were insignificant skirmishes, occurring no one knows when or where, and which Myth had transformed and glorified into great victories ; that the

battle of Waterloo was a victory of Napoleon, not a defeat; that it took place after his invasion of England—which had been not only threatened, but executed—and not in the Netherlands, but in England itself; that the whole episode of St. Helena is to be esteemed legendary; and that the great Emperor really died in the fulness of years, glory, and honour; lastly, that even the minor facts that may be retained out of 'this strange eventful history' must be perpetually readjusted, as to time, place, and circumstances, by some such adroit criticism as M. Renan brings to bear on the Gospel narratives,—showing how such and such facts cannot be admitted, because awkwardly complicated with facts already rejected as incredible; and that from 'necessary laws of development,' such and such others must have belonged to a different period of Napoleon's life! Now, if all this, and more, had to be done in order to 'reconstruct' the history of Napoleon, the question is, What value would anybody attach to any such 'reconstruction?' Considerably less, we fancy, than even to that of M. Thiers, who has a tolerable faculty of reconstruction too, but not for a moment to be compared with that which M. Renan has displayed in his *roman* 'de Jésus.'

In investigating the facts of any history there are no doubt various degrees of evidence to which we shall do well to take heed. We are not to suppose (as M. Renan justly says) that we have no history at all,

merely because we meet with some contradictions, discrepancies, or points hard to be reconciled. But it is a question of *degree*, just as it is a question how much light will enable a man to see. We can see plainly enough in the daylight, and we can see tolerably even in twilight ; but in utter darkness we can see nothing. In such darkness, though made, we confess, by shutting his own eyes, M. Renan 'dreams a dream,' and then calls it 'Vie de Jésus.'

There is an advanced school of critics who venture to promise us—under the reign of 'positive science,' and in virtue of those 'laws of necessary development' of all phenomena, physical and social, which it is to unfold—that the time will come when men will be able to write future history; history will be a 'science,' and there is to be a 'prevision' of it. We have as yet seen but little to warrant any expectation of that happy epoch; but in writing the history of the *past*, under similar conditions,—showing that this or that could not have happened, though uniformly accredited, and that this or that must have happened, though never hitherto heard of,—in *this* style of writing we have many proficients, and none greater than M. Renan. The history of the *future* is still unhappily unattempted ; the history of the past—totally different from what it has hitherto been supposed to be—may be got *ad libitum*. M. Renan scornfully rejects the very notion of the ancient prophecies of the future ; yet if his book be *true*,

he has really performed the very feat he deems impossible, only for bygone instead of coming ages. If not a prophet of the *future*, he is—if we may be pardoned the Hibernicism—a prophet of the *past*.

We have said that M. Renan's book is an attempt to give the true history of Christ after assuming the main principles of Strauss, *i. e.*, the entire rejection of miracle and prophecy, and the ascription of everything of this kind in the Gospels to myth and legend. But though the basis of the two works is the same, their differences are sufficiently striking and instructive to merit a passing notice. Strauss does not attempt, as M. Renan in his more ambitious book, to build again what he flatters himself he has pulled down. He has taken a safer course, and left the reader, under the unmitigated impression of protracted cavil and microscopic objections, to infer that there is nothing distinctly tangible in the history. The process of critical sublimation is complete ; there is hardly anything left in the crucible. With this result M. Renan is not satisfied ; yet, adopting the same principles, he surely ought to be. M. Renan, aware that the destructive criticism of Strauss, strictly carried out, would reduce Christ to a mere shadow—whose history it would be as impossible to reconstruct, as that of Perseus or Hercules—advertises us that though he adopts the same principles in the main, he does not go quite so far. In a note (p. viii.),

after saying that Strauss never intended to deny the *existence* of Christ, he adds, 'Ce qui est vrai, c'est que M. Strauss suppose le caractère individuel de Jésus plus effacé pour nous qu'il ne l'est peut-être en réalité.'

The object of Strauss is to show, by detailed criticism, that the discrepancies of the Gospels are such as to render their historical character incredible; in fact, he does much what Colenso virtually attempts in the case of the Pentateuch. But he does not endeavour to give a formal account of the great problem of the Origin of Christianity, and would be doubtless satisfied if the reader accept his simply negative results.

The general *tone* of Strauss's book is conformable to its character and design; it is cold and passionless, unless a sneer now and then may be said to indicate passion. It is as if the spirit of criticism, like a sand-wind from the desert, had dried up all human moisture —tears, blood, marrow. It is a spirit of criticism that loves to 'walk in dry places.' His book reminds us —all strewed as it is with chips of the most arid discussion— of the Psalmist's expression; it is 'as when a man cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth.' M. Renan's work, as it differs in its object, differs also in manner. It is an attempt to reconstruct the history of Christ out of little more than the scanty materials which Strauss had left, and it possesses imaginative qualities accordingly, to which the German can make

no pretension. M. Renan takes Strauss's criticism as he wants it, but never stays to justify it *in extenso*. The 'Leben Jesu' is a quarry whence he draws a large part of his materials, but it is nothing more. Though the superiority of Strauss in critical skill and learning cannot be denied, M. Renan has genius, sentiment,—though rather of a sickly cast, we confess,—imagination, and much descriptive power, especially of scenery. Indeed, his love of the picturesque is only too seductive. He seems to plume himself not a little on the opportunities afforded by his residence in Palestine of studying the features of the country; and to fancy that because he gazed upon that country *as it is*, it gives him some peculiar lights as to the historic truth or falsehood of the Gospel itself! He says: 'All that history which, at a distance, seemed to float in the clouds of an unreal world, immediately took a *body*, a *solidity*, which astonished me. The striking accord between the places and the text, the marvellous harmony of the evangelical ideal with the country which served as the picture-frame, were as a revelation to me. I had before my eyes a *fifth* gospel—mutilated, but still legible.' . . .

Now, that an intimate knowledge of the localities might enable him to attain a more vivid sense of that truth to nature which is found in the scriptural descriptions of scenery, we can understand; but how it should at all qualify him to deal with the higher problems

which are the special subjects of his book is not very comprehensible. We should as soon fancy that men might read the true history of Stonehenge by going to stare at it, or tell whether the Decalogue was really delivered from Mount Sinai by climbing to its summit. M. Renan's is, indeed, a new way of rewriting lost history. Will no traveller to Rome and Italy, by looking hard at the natural features, kindly do as much for early Roman history, and solve, in this novel way, the troublesome problems of Niebuhr and his opponents? Or is no one capable of these 'astonishing revelations' of historical 'second sight,' but M. Renan?

It is by inspiration of this '*genius loci*'—this Egeria of the sacred groves of Palestine—that M. Renan, who, like Strauss, rejects by far the greater part of the entire Gospels, and *all* that is most important, and who ought by rights to have acquiesced in the same results, has attained his new revelation. He is ambitious of achieving the fame of one of his own country's cooks, who, according to Goldsmith's 'Citizen of the World,' could make three dishes out of a dock-leaf; and therefore, adopting Strauss's destructive criticism of the history as we *have* it, has undertaken to give us a 'romance' upon the history, as we have it *not*.

We now proceed to what is, after all, our chief object, namely, to consider whether the supposititious Christ of M. Renan's 'Cinquième Évangile' is worthy

of the admiration which has been accorded to the Christ of the other Four. We admit that his language is often almost strong enough for 'orthodoxy' itself,—so strong that a nervous fellow-sceptic might now and then feel as the friends of Charles James Fox are said to have felt, when they heard him state objections to his own arguments with such alarming candour and cogency as to engender a doubt whether he would be able effectually to demolish them! M. Renan tells us that Jesus, in His interview with the Samaritan woman, 'uttered for the first time the word upon which will repose the edifice of the eternal religion' (p. 234); that, 'after having run through all the circles of error, humanity will return to that word, as the immortal expression of its faith and its hopes' (p. 135); that 'history is altogether incomprehensible without Jesus' (p. lix.); that 'Jesus is without an equal—his glory remains entire and will be perpetually renewed' (p. 93); that 'he founded that lofty spiritualism which during so many ages has filled souls with joy amidst this valley of tears' (p. 176); that, amongst the 'pillars' that rise above the dead level of ordinary humanity, 'Jesus is the loftiest,—he shows men whence they come and whither they ought to tend; that in him was condensed all that is good and elevated in our nature; that, though not impeccable nor faultless, and probably having many faults which his disciples have concealed ('il est probable aussi que beaucoup de ses fautes ont

été dissimulées'), yet . . . . Jesus will never be surpassed; . . . . all coming ages will proclaim that, among the sons of men, there has never been born one greater than Jesus' (pp. 458–9).

But let not the admirers of M. Renan be in any alarm in the present case; his language is simply calculated to disguise the deformity of a more naked and vulgar unbelief. All the above rhetoric is rhetoric and nothing more. What he gives to Christ with one hand, he takes care to abstract with the other. No admission is made in the general description that is not either retracted or qualified in the details; sometimes, we regret to say, by inuendos of Christ's connivance at 'pious frauds,' and admitted possible participation in them; sometimes by sinister apologies for His gross ignorance; sometimes by charges of pitiable weakness and instability, the rankest fanaticism, the most childish errors; sometimes by attributing to Him an enormous 'egotism,' which it is really impossible to attribute to anything but a disordered intellect or downright imposture.

We must judge of M. Renan's real meaning, as of many an author, rather from his comments than his text; rather from his details than from his summary statements. Nothing can be more complimentary than his vague *general* descriptions of Christ, nothing more damaging than the limitations and restrictions with which they are, it seems, to be interpreted. Even

his strongest panegyrics always have the *aliquid amari* mixed with them ; they are like that 'Sardinian honey,' which is said to have had in it as much bitterness as sweetness ; or rather they remind us of the panegyrics of Joseph Surface, whose compliments are but the treacherous preface of his subtle defamation.

We venture to say, therefore, that the true spirit of M. Renan's '*Cinquième* Évangile' has been accurately, though unconsciously, described by all the first *Four*, and particularly by Matthew, in the following words : 'And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand : and they bowed the knee before him, and *mocked* him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and led him away to crucify him' (Matt. xxvii. 29–31).

But let us look a little at M. Renan's picture in detail, and consider whether the evolution of such a phenomenon as *his* Jesus is possible, or consistent with the given conditions ; or, if it could be evolved, could ever have moved anything but the scorn and pity of mankind. It is essential that the reader should bear in mind the purely *human* limits within which M. Renan restricts himself; and we must, therefore, for the moment regard the 'Jewish carpenter' merely as a young man of vigorous natural genius, with a strong

bias to enthusiastic dreaming, and a happy turn for moral speculation; to which M. Renan adds an unrivalled mode of teaching,—of uttering precepts and maxims with a singular point and force, which made them fly farther and strike harder than those of most other teachers.

As a *teacher*, M. Renan represents Jesus as possessed of an unrivalled simplicity, tenderness, and impressiveness of *manner*; but that is nearly all. For, the substance of His teaching—so far as it was true or sublime—he takes care to tell us had 'little originality, and had been nearly all anticipated by preceding sages and rabbis of his own nation.'* The best of His maxims are not His own; many that are so are neither

* 'Like all the Rabbis of the time, Jesus, little given to close reasoning, embodied his doctrine in concise aphorisms, and in a form expressive indeed, but sometimes enigmatical and absurd. Some of these maxims came from the books of the Old Testament; others were the thoughts of more modern sages, especially of Antigonus of Soco, of Jesus son of Sirach, and of Hillel, which had come to his knowledge, not by a course of learned study, but as proverbs in every one's mouth. The synagogue was rich in maxims, very happily expressed, which formed a sort of current proverbial literature. Jesus adopted almost all this oral instruction, penetrating it, however, with a superior spirit. . . . . As to almsgiving, compassion, good works, meekness, the love of peace, perfect disinterestedness of heart, he had little to add to the teaching of the synagogue; but he threw into them a tone full of unction, which gave these aphorisms, long before known, a new face. . . . Little original in itself, (if it be meant by that, that one might, from more ancient maxims, recompose it almost entirely), the evangelic morality remains no less the highest creation which has ever issued from the human conscience,

true nor just. We have seen that he represents Christ as teaching manifold falsities and errors, often as pernicious as they were absurd. He preached the most naked communism; He taught the most '*bizarre* political economy.' 'Avarice' with Him was the capital crime of the Christian code, and that 'avarice' *meant* 'simple attachment to property.' He blessed the poor *as such*, and condemned the rich *as such*; and in so doing must have confounded all moral distinctions. In harmony with all this, our author deems the 'Mendicant Orders' the truest representatives and genuine successors of the primitive disciples of Christ! According to M. Renan, excellent as were the principles on which Jesus enjoined 'no care for the morrow,' He carried them to excess; he inculcated them with a literal rigour which might be well adapted to His simple Galilean flock, whom the unforced bounty of nature supplied with all that they needed, but which would be utterly inapplicable to the rest of the world, and simply furnish arguments for a dreaming indolence.

Such is Christ as a moral teacher. He had little

the finest code of perfect life which any moralist has ever traced' (pp. 81-4). 'The day in which the young carpenter of Nazareth began to preach these maxims, for the most part already widely known, formed no great event. It was only one Rabbi the more—though doubtless the most charming' (p. 91). It is not easy to reconcile these paradoxes, except on the supposition that M. Renan designs to equate all his eulogistic sayings to—zero. His *plus* and *minus* effectually destroy one another.

originality; His truths all old and borrowed; His novelties, for the most part egregious errors! Of the critical methods by which M. Renan discovers these defects of Christ's teaching we have already spoken; we are here only considering whether the Christ he paints be, as a teacher, worthy of his eulogies, or such as to account for the veneration and homage of mankind. On the contrary, we believe that few impartial readers of M. Renan's book will hesitate to say that if Christ was nothing more as a teacher than our author paints Him, He must have been, in spite of the merits of His 'parabolic style,' one of the most foolish, wrong-headed, impracticable, and mischievous teachers in the world.

One thing, however, we beg to suggest. If Christ taught all that M. Renan attributes to Him, our author certainly ought to retract the declaration that He had 'little originality;' for He must certainly have been one of the most original, though absurdly original, of mankind.

As for His *condition*, He was a simple Galilean peasant, and His knowledge, or rather ignorance, correspondent to His station: He knew nothing of geography, science, or politics—of the 'extent or power of the Roman Empire;' he was equally destitute of all 'Greek culture.' But M. Renan's *revelations* on this subject are not all negative. He gives us a very precise account of Christ's Jewish studies; says He read

with much attention the Hebrew Scriptures, and especially the Psalms—which, he says, had a special charm for His 'lyric soul'—and without a doubt many also of the later apocryphal Jewish books, especially of *Enoch* and *Daniel*, both quietly assumed to be equally apocryphal; and that from the last He afterwards appropriated His Messianic title of 'the Son of Man,' as well as many of His Messianic notions.

Such then was He, and no more, who, in virtue of such scanty endowments and qualifications, was to become the 'Light of the World' and the 'Founder of the Religion of Humanity!' How He could become so, if the primary attributes of Jesus were these, and no more, and His subsequent character and history what M. Renan supposes, is the most inscrutable of problems.

For this simple Jewish peasant (M. Renan admits) actually came to entertain the modest hallucination that he was predestined to set up a universal empire, to act as the delegate of Omnipotence, and at last (and that very soon, according to our author's version of Christ's opinions) to come in the clouds of Heaven—in conformity with the *apocryphal* Daniel's programme—to destroy the world and to judge the nations! How he came to dream this strange dream, except on the supposition of incurable insanity, M. Renan does not inform us; on all this, his book leaves us in absolute darkness. He has, indeed, a mysterious sentence or two on certain influences which may possibly have

wrought on Jesus; but as '*causes*' of such prodigious phenomena, they account for them about as well as 'Tenterden Steeple' for the 'Goodwin Sands.' The Jews, he tells us, had long indulged in '*rêves gigantesques*'—gigantic dreams—as to the future of their nation; and in the midst of these wild notions, in 'the burning atmosphere of Palestine,' was the lot of Jesus cast. These notions were not taught 'in any school,' but they were 'in the air,'—which is doubtless true, and also that M. Renan found them there. For why the Jews should have given themselves to all these 'gigantic dreams,' is, on M. Renan's theory, impossible to say. But why Jesus should egotistically *appropriate* them, and suppose Himself the sole subject of them, is a mystery far greater, and on which our author throws not one ray of light. Though M. Renan ascribes to the Jew a species of '*prophetic sense*,' which at times renders 'the "Semite" marvellously *apt* to see the great lines of the future;' it will not stand us in any stead here, since Christ's Messianic visions of the future, as well as those of His countrymen, were, in the estimation of M. Renan, the merest delusions; not to say that M. Renan—who rejects *all* prophecy—does not explain what this '*species* of prophetic sense' is, while his investiture of the 'Semite' with any such quality, as a peculiarity of mere *race*, is entirely of his own gratuitous bounty! We can only say that if the appropriation of the said 'gigantic dreams' of His

countrymen, by Christ, is to be accounted for only on grounds supplied by M. Renan, it must be inferred that Jesus was utterly 'demented' from His very cradle.

Think of the extent of that self-delusion which M. Renan's hypothesis ascribes to this Jewish peasant! Jesus is represented as *imagining* Himself to be 'the Son of God,' the regenerator of the world, the Judge of all, the Vicegerent of Omnipotence, the agent in the coming destruction of the Old world, (a catastrophe which He believed to be immediately imminent,) and the Lord of the New, which was to fill up its place! Though frequently vacillating in His views, they culminated in these purely frantic notions of Himself, and the world about Him; and, accordingly, in virtue of His supposed supremacy, He claimed the absolute self-surrender of all mankind to Him! To promote his empire—the end of all this crazy fanaticism—He was also willing to lend Himself, in various ways, to the false impressions His disciples formed of His miraculous power and superhuman knowledge, and to connive at their gross misconceptions on these subjects. Finally, He commits a sort of suicide, by exasperating the Jews to kill Him, with some strange notions as to His death being necessary for the establishment of the 'kingdom of God,' though it is impossible to tell how or why, nor does M. Renan condescend to inform us. And this, in short, is M. Renan's

Christ! whose projects import madness, and whose means to attain His visionary ends were often morally contemptible!

It is not without reason we speak thus strongly.

His Messianic 'dreams'—all pure 'dreams' in M. Renan's representation, all utterly chimerical, beginning in self-delusion and ending in it—it is impossible to suppose, in a *mere* man, the product of anything but the veriest midsummer madness—a madness to which that of Lear may be deemed sobriety; unless, indeed, anyone choose the worse alternative of ascribing them to blasphemous imposture. M. Renan is *obliged* to admit that Christ really claimed to be the Vicegerent of God on earth, the future Judge of quick and dead, the exclusive object of the unquestioning obedience and supreme love of every human creature! All this M. Renan frankly attributes to Christ; while he as frankly concedes that Christ had no ground whatever for these enormous hallucinations except the illusions of his own imagination. He takes away the only solid substratum of these pretensions, apart from which Christ is inevitably exposed to the charge of mere madness or the most prodigious impiety. If we deny the reality of that special commission to which Christ laid claim, and the superhuman attributes He was thus empowered to exercise, it is impossible for anyone to contemplate Him in any other light than that of a stark lunatic or an

arch-impostor. The result is, as we have said, that no one can read the details of M. Renan's delineation of Christ, or compare the complete portrait with his laudatory outline, without feeling that the *tout ensemble*, instead of justifying the encomiums of the painter, produces an impression of utter incongruity. With some great and some estimable qualities, we see a mixture of the most pitiable or criminal weaknesses; *tracasseries* and low cunning worthy of a charlatan, the self-idolising arrogance and egotism of a lunatic, or, if he were not mad, the most horrible extravagances of an unparalleled impostor.

Not less besotted does M. Renan represent Jesus in His belief of His supernatural powers, since every hour must have contradicted that belief, unless (as already said) He was throughout life an absolute maniac. The reader will recollect that on M. Renan's theory, there was and could be no such thing as the supernatural—a truth, however, only recently discovered. Let us hear how Jesus thought on this matter.

'It is necessary to bear in mind that all antiquity, except the great scientific schools of Greece, and their Roman pupils, believed in miracles; that Jesus not only believed in them, but had not the *least idea of a natural order regulated by laws*. . . . Further, one of his most inveterate opinions was, that by faith and prayer man was omnipotent over nature. The power to

work miracles was reckoned as regularly licensed by God to man, and had nothing surprising in it' (p. 257).

Some may, perhaps, doubt whether even a madman was ever mad enough to believe all this; but certainly only a *perfect* madman could.—It is quite ludicrous to see the way in which our modern philosophers, (in order to show that folks never had any notion of a 'law of nature' till *they* discovered it to us, as also to diminish the difficulty of accounting for men's inveterate belief of miracles,) are pleased to exaggerate the ignorance of the ancient world on this subject, and to represent it as living in a perpetual day-dream! One would think that our fathers never saw the sun go down with any confidence that it would rise again the next morning; never tilled the soil, because it was dubious whether they would ever reap a harvest; or, when they sowed wheat, never knew that it might not bring forth cockle; or that they expected (which Christ, with a very clear notion of a 'law,' says they never do) 'to gather grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles.' Now, the fact is that though they believed in the 'miraculous' more readily than our modern sceptics, we have good reason to know that their conviction of the *general* stability of the ordinary succession of antecedents and consequents was just as firm as our own. But whatever their credulity, it is certain that no man could live in the illusion that *he* had the power, whenever he liked, of disturbing the order of

nature, in the face of perpetual demonstration from experience, of the contrary, (which is the theory of M. Renan in relation to Christ,) unless he was a maniac of the most frenzied type.

Nor does it mend matters, that he leaves it uncertain whether our Lord was simply the dupe of His own illusions, or was astutely playing on the illusions of others: or rather, he makes him out alternately dupe and knave. Whatever His hallucinations, M. Renan every now and then charges Him with a low cunning and *tracasserie*, one degree worse than charging Him with madness. He represents Him (contrary to the tenour of the Gospel narrative) as suspiciously *reluctant* to perform miracles, concealing them as much as possible, and exhibiting many other indications of self-distrust as to the possession of 'thaumaturgic powers;' but readily falling in with, perhaps actively aiding, the delusions of His disciples on the subject. He winked at their gross deception in ascribing to Him superhuman powers which He did not possess; humoured, instead of correcting, the preposterous conceptions which they had formed of His person and pretensions where He knew them to be false; and suffered them, — well pleased with a homage which was to be made serviceable to His designs,— to ascribe to a supernatural source, a knowledge of things which He well knew to be due only to His superior natural sagacity!

Nor is this all; M. Renan openly avows that Christ may sometimes have actively participated in those simulated miracles which he admits must have given Him much of His *prestige*; and as plainly implies that, supposing Him to have done so, it was no great matter! But such apologies are utterly abominable; and simply prove that it is pretty clear M. Renan would have thus acted the Jesuit in similar circumstances. It is in vain that he tells any unsophisticated understanding, or a conscience that has not learned to juggle with itself, that we are not to judge of the moral susceptibilities of that day by our own; in vain that he affects, (especially in the very act of uttering such Jesuitical distinctions,) to monopolise for *modern times*, that absolutely disinterested tone of truth, that passionate desire to produce conviction only by fair means, which, it seems, the slow progress of science has alone produced! We take leave to doubt, from such passages in M. Renan's book, whether our age *is* so absolutely abandoned to the love of truth as he flatters himself; and, whether it be so or not, we certainly doubt the justness of his apology. We doubt whether the profound 'science' of modern days be necessary in order to teach elementary duty in such matters; and should certainly deny to any teacher of morals, in any age, who resorted to such '*supercherie*' and charlatanism, any very high place among the instructors and benefactors of mankind. We think the moral sense of

mere human nature has in all ages condemned, even when it has *practised*, these arts; and we cannot reconcile such ignorance as this representation implies, with the teaching of Him who ever enjoined sincerity of speech and conduct; who so vehemently rebuked the Jews for imitating in their conduct 'their father the Devil, who loveth a lie, and is the father of it;' and who commanded us to let our 'yea be yea, and our nay, nay.'

Another of M. Renan's apologies is equally questionable, or, rather, seems itself to smack of that Jesuitry—that knack of sanctifying the means by the ends—from which he so complacently supposes that 'modern science' has delivered us. He loftily rebukes those who would censure the deceptive arts of those 'demigods,' (of whom Christ is, according to him, a conspicuous example,) who know how to make their 'lies' beneficent. He asks whether we, pigmies and 'mesquins' of this degenerate age, can produce by our 'truth' what they did by their 'lies;' and if not, we had better, it seems, hold our tongues! In short, M. Renan's adoration of brilliant success is rather too *prononcée* even for a Frenchman; he evidently thinks that very considerable breaches of the Decalogue may be pardoned to it. The following passage may be read with much edification, along with that glowing eulogy, before quoted, on the inconvenient love of truth of the scientific age!

'Il nous est facile à nous autres, impuissants que nous sommes, d'appeler cela mensonge, et, fiers de notre timide honnêteté, de traiter avec dédain les héros qui ont accepté dans d'autres conditions la lutte de la vie. Quand nous aurons fait avec nos scrupules ce qu'ils firent avec leurs mensonges, nous aurons le droit d'être pour eux sévères. Au moins, faut-il distinguer profondément les sociétés comme la nôtre, où tout se passe au plein jour de la réflexion, des sociétés naïves et crédules, où sont nées les croyances qui ont dominé les siècles. Il n'est pas de grande fondation qui ne repose sur une légende. Le seul coupable, en pareil cas, c'est l'humanité qui veut être trompée' (pp. 253-4).

All which, translated into plain language, means that 'Heroes' are at liberty to say, 'Populus vult decipi, et decipietur.'

Of lesser foibles and errors, ascribed to the Jesus of M. Renan's romance, we have no space to speak. Suffice it to say, that there are few which ordinary mortals have, that our author has not attributed to Him, and sometimes such as are contradictory. At every turn we meet with some flaw, some defect which makes it impossible not to wonder at M. Renan's occasional altitudes of encomiastic rhetoric. We cannot tell whether his own intellect be eccentric enough to allow of his having written this book in 'good faith,' and to permit us to believe all his rhapsodies of admiration sincere; but we confess that only 'the charity that believeth all things' enables us to

do so, considering his habitual tone of depreciation. He eagerly adopts and patronises those perverse interpretations of certain incidents or precepts in the Gospels, which the open enemies of Christianity have ever used for the very purpose of proving Christ's errors and imperfections. We hardly recollect an instance to the contrary. Thus, he not only attenuates, as much as possible, the originality of Christ's moral teachings, but in various points caricatures and travesties His precepts;—by adopting the most rigorous literality in the interpretation of them, or by a wayward and perverse wresting of *single* passages, when a comparison with others will give a more reasonable meaning. His expositions of some leading points of Christ's moral teaching, and his comments on them, are just those of the various infidel writers whose object has been to diminish the claims of Christ to the world's reverence, and to dwarf His intellectual and moral stature; to prove, not His lofty pre-eminence, as M. Renan affects to do, but His imperfections, His extravagances, His ignorance, His errors. How is it that while affecting to exalt Jesus on so lofty a pedestal, he manages to stumble on the very criticisms of those who most industriously depreciate Him?

Utterly futile are M. Renan's attempts to extenuate the preposterous '*egotism*' of Christ (*i. e.* egotism on his theory) in demanding the absolute surrender of every human creature, body, soul, and spirit, to His absolute will. All this is, indeed, quite *natural* on the

ordinary evangelical hypothesis ; but is simply a proof of Christ's being out of His senses, if He were nothing more than the enthusiast M. Renan supposes. The most intolerably vain and despotic master that ever exacted reverence from his disciples, never went this length. There is, indeed, one other hypothesis ; but it would only make matters worse for M. Renan's 'Hero ;' and that is, that he acted from conscious imposture and not from the frenzy of an unparalleled vanity. M. Renan, indeed, is pleased to tell us that we are not to be offended with all this 'egotism' in Christ, as if it were censurable ; in all other men it would be, but not in Him ! M. Renan thus naïvely speaks of His declaration that He should come in glory and in the clouds of heaven, to 'confound all those who had rejected Him :'—

'L'audace d'une telle conception ne doit pas nous surprendre. Jésus s'envisageait depuis longtemps avec Dieu sur le pied d'un fils avec son père. Ce qui chez d'autres serait un orgueil insupportable, ne doit pas chez lui être traité d'attentat' (p. 237).

Begging our author's pardon, however, if Christ be nothing more than a man, we must try Him by the rules of men. If He indulged in these fantastical claims to universal power and fantastical demands of unlimited love and self-sacrifice on the part of the whole species ; if He insisted on all the world bowing down to Him in absolute self-abnegation ; and all only in virtue of a '*rêve sublime*;' we think there would be very

good reason for not only demurring to His claims, but treating His pretensions with as sovereign scorn and indifference as we should the pretensions of any straw-crowned monarch of Bedlam.

Such are the real dimensions to which M. Renan's details reduce Christ; such the miserable anticlimax of his eulogies of his 'greatest of the sons of men.' Can *this* be He, we are ready to exclaim, who has received far wider and more devoted homage from the most various races, barbarian and polished, than any other of our species? Can this maimed, halting character, full of flaws in every aspect; this doting dreamer, filled with the vainest illusions fancying Himself possessed of 'all power in heaven and on earth,' and as rightfully claiming the absolute surrender, body and soul, of every individual of the human race; steeped in self-ignorance, presumption, and egotism; whose madness, more frantic than that of any ordinary Bedlamite, was combined with vulgar *tracasseries* only worthy of a strolling fortune-teller—can this be He who has changed the face of the world? *Quantum mutatus ab illo!*

For the various reasons assigned above, we do not in the least wonder that many, who believe in the evangelic Christ as little as M. Renan, and who are ready to bow down in implicit veneration to any eastern sage, provided they know little enough about him to make him, in their imagination, a competitor of Christ, are vehemently angry at the extravagant tone of M. Renan's hyperbolic eulogies of the 'Jewish car-

penter.' We do not wonder that they are jealous for the honour of Buddha! This has been amusingly exemplified of late, in a pamphlet by one of M. Renan's infidel compatriots, who are as little likely to be satisfied with his 'Vie de Jésus' as any Christian in the world. This writer stands up bravely for the claims of old Buddha, whom he represents as a far wiser teacher and a far greater genius than Jesus Christ. M. Renan, like blind old Jacob, blessing the sons of Joseph, places, it seems, his rhetorical coronet on the wrong head! We fear it cannot be said of him, as of the patriarch, that he 'guides his hands wittingly' in the matter. But it is certainly droll to find these infidel champions of Christ and Buddha waging this pleasant *νυκτομαχία*. The one contends for the superior glory of Christ, though he has struck out all that is most significant from the only records which tell us anything about Him,—all that can alone protect Him from the charge of madness or imposture; and the other sings the superior praises of Buddha, though history has left his name little more than a shadow. For ourselves, we frankly confess, that if 'le petit Christ' of M. Renan is to be taken as a true description of Him of whom 'Moses and the prophets' are supposed 'to have spoken,' we do not at all wonder that many should be angry at His name being placed so immeasurablyabove those of Socrates, Confucius, and Buddha.

The reader can now judge whether the portrait of Christ painted by M. Renan sustains either his own

high-flown panegyrics or corresponds to the Christ who has cast such a spell over the world. In truth, it harmonises neither with the one nor the other. If we were to grant that the *ideal* of Christ, as portrayed in M. Renan's vague language of general eulogy, were ever so entrancing and captivating, it is not the Christ portrayed in his own detailed statements; the one is in hopeless and utter contradiction to the other. And even if the Christ he lavishes his sentimental rhetoric on were the real Christ, it is not the Christ mankind has believed in, not the Christ who has changed the face of the world and enamoured the heart of humanity. HE who has done *that*, has been believed to be, and precisely *because* He was believed to be, the supernatural Christ whose advent was predicted by prophecy, whose claims were confirmed by miracle; the Wonder-Worker, the Redeemer, the great Propitiation, the Intercessor, the Vicegerent of God, the depositary of 'all power in heaven and earth,' the future 'judge of the quick and dead.' He it is who has achieved these wonders.

Christianity, we agree with M. Renan, is a great phenomenon, and has exercised a prodigious influence on the world; but it has been, and is, a great phenomenon, in virtue of the very elements which M. Renan considers its *falsities*; it is as a supposed supernatural phenomenon, and as such only, that it has achieved so much; it has been embraced as such, *lived* for as such, *died* for as such.

And—oh! impotent conclusion of all M. Renan's eulogies—he further tells us that if Christianity afterwards shot up to so great a height, and became so overshadowing a phenomenon in the world, it was because circumstances shaped it into a form the Founder never dreamed of, and fulfilled His predictions in a sense He never meant! His chosen watchwords must be interpreted in a sense He never affixed to them, and 'the kingdom of God' and its 'good news' became substantial truths, though Christ in fact meant by them 'something else;' in short, that the Founder of Christianity was always mistaken, though Christianity (as interpreted by M. Renan) was always true: that is, we are called upon to admire Jesus for what He was not, and for issues which He never thought of; issues which were altogether at variance with His expectations, and took effect not in consequence, but in spite of, His Utopian dreams!

It is impossible to close M. Renan's book, and refrain from asking some such questions as these: If Christ had in Him really *no more* than M. Renan ascribes to Him in his laudatory outline sketch, or, unhappily, as *much* as he ascribes to Him in his minute portrait—

1st. How came His contemporaries to bestow upon Him infinitely higher attributes, and to transmute Him into a Christ absolutely Divine? Supposing the

story of Mount Tabor a myth, (as M. Renan does,) how came Christ's contemporaries to more than realise and fulfil it?—first enveloping their Master in a 'cloud' of stupendously fabulous legends, and thereby utterly suppressing His genuine history till preternaturally revealed in M. Renan's 'Fifth Gospel,' and then letting Him emerge to the world in the splendour of a truly glorious 'Transfiguration?' How came they to surround His simple history (and His very questionable claims to veneration, if He be truly painted by M. Renan) with the very wildest figments of legendary invention? Even if Christ *really* was what M. Renan describes Him, and no more, would not this other phenomenon—the rise and origin, the success and triumph of a strange *legendary* Christ, who has wholly eclipsed the *true*—as much require to be investigated and accounted for as ever?

If the Christ depicted in M. Renan's pages be a true photograph, it is not possible to comprehend from what causes His immediate followers could so utterly misconceive, or from what motives they should so utterly disguise Him. How came they to admit His Utopian dreams, His claims to universal dominion, His miraculous powers, His right to demand the absolute self-sacrificing obedience of every human creature, without a question? or proceed to transmit to the world—and all this without being themselves either fools or impostors—the most prodigious *fardeau* of lying wonders

(solemnly vouched for as facts) which the world has ever seen?

We do *not* ask how such a Christ as M. Renan's portrait presents, succeeded in enchaining the attention of the world and leading humanity captive; for *this* he plainly never did. M. Renan's Christ, if he ever existed, has assuredly achieved no such success; it is the miraculous Christ, the Christ of the Gospels, the transformed Christ, that has been the world's idol. But what we ask is, how came he to be so grossly mistaken by his followers, and transmuted into the totally different Christ, who alone is known to humanity?

2ndly. Another question, of course, follows, but which, like the preceding, M. Renan's book leaves wholly unanswered: namely, how, on *any* hypothesis, within *seventy* years of Christ's death, came the world to substitute that purely legendary Christ of the Gospels for either M. Renan's shadowy outline or his more minute but most incongruous portrait? With two or three remarks on this point we will conclude.

Much is said by advocates of the 'mythical theory' about the imperceptible effect of a '*long time*' in gradually accrediting the most enormous legends. They go back to such remote ages, we are told, that their very origin is forgotten. This 'long time,' however, and this gradual growth, are the very things that in the present case are wanting. This '*deus ex machinâ*,' this 'auld lang syne,' which is so pathetically invoked by our modern philosophers when they want

to explain a perplexing phenomenon—to account for the 'transmutation of species' or to prove the 'legendary origin of Christianity'—cannot here stalk upon the stage. It is no doubt true that we in vain attempt to investigate the origin or diffusion of many a cycle of myths; they lose themselves, as is justly said, in the shadows of a pre-historic age; they were very gradually formed during centuries of profound ignorance, and at length emerged, with all their too characteristic deformities and incongruities upon them, from the realms of 'chaos and old night.' But this will not apply to the presumed 'myths' of Christianity. The religion was *born* in an historic age, with thousands of keen eyes upon it—eyes in a multitude of cases sharpened by malignity, and in all cases by prejudice: what is more, the 'legend' of Christianity is supposed, even by M. Renan's own admission, to be complete in the four Gospels within about seventy years after the death of its Founder, and from that time at least had no difficulty in imposing itself for veritable history on every convert, whether Jewish or heathen, learned or ignorant; a fact which, if true, is utterly at war with all the analogies of other mythologies. One would imagine that many centuries at least, and those of deep darkness, would be necessary for the gradual formation and reception of such monstrous 'legends' as these. Nay, the history of Christianity itself in the dark ages would seem to give us clear demonstration of this necessity.

The 'dark ages' are not *so* dark as to prevent us from pretty clearly seeing in what way and by what slow steps Christianity was at length corrupted into something very like the heathen idolatry it supplanted. The pretension of the Bishop of Rome, for example, to be Christ's vicegerent on earth, required the best part of a thousand years to bring it into full bloom, and, like the night-blowing Cereus, only attained it when twilight had darkened into night — even then only by the long suppression of those 'Gospels' which would have contradicted the preposterous claim. On the other hand, while it required a thousand years to make the Pope an indifferent vicegerent of Christ, it took, it seems, only seventy years to convince the world that a 'Jewish carpenter' was not only the vicegerent of God, but God Incarnate, and to authenticate all the prodigious legends—if legends at all—of his incarnation, resurrection, and ascension!

To meet this difficulty, neither Strauss nor Renan suggests anything; they simply ignore it. M. Renan, indeed (and it is to his credit in this matter), has admitted the difficulty. Under the stress of historic evidence, he comes to the conclusion that all the four Gospels had assumed their present form by A.D. 100; leaving, as we have said, only a margin of about seventy years for the origination, growth, circulation, reception, and, lastly, consignment to writings which have ever since kept the world spell-bound, of these

strange stories,—stories which, if false, make as large 'demands' on popular credulity as the 'Arabian Nights,' and yet which, it seems, popular credulity immediately 'honoured!' Others a little enlarge the limit. They think the actual compilation and general reception of the 'Gospels' can hardly be referred to an earlier date than the middle or towards the close of the second century. But, in fact, either limit is ridiculous; for by the year 150 we have the clearest evidence, from independent sources, that Christianity had largely extended its conquests in nearly every part of the Roman Empire.

The improbability of the theory may be measured by the very modest progress (in comparison with that of the Apostles) which modern Christian missions have made during this century. Yet, if the Apostles had no miraculous endowments, they possessed no advantage in which multitudes of modern missionaries have not been their equals, often their superiors; and as to the 'message,' if that, *ex hypothesi*, was 'legend,' it is but 'legend' still. Now, if the early propagandists of the Gospel had *nothing* to appeal to but the so-called 'legends' of the Gospel,—that is, to just the same instruments of success as modern missions,—the progress of the latter ought to have been equal to that of the former. It will not do to say that the people to whom the first emissaries of the Gospel were sent, were more credulous than those in

our own sceptical day; for, though *we* may be sceptical, the heathen now are the very counterpart of the heathen then; not at all 'sceptical,' it is admitted, in either ancient or modern times, but in both cases profoundly enslaved to their superstitions: which superstitions, it seems, the ancient Gentiles surrendered with comparative ease, though the modern Gentiles will not! We do not wonder at the tardy progress of 'missions' now; they are fully as successful as the tremendous obstacles (often represented by their enemies, when it suits a purpose, to be not only formidable, but *insurmountable*) would fairly allow us to hope: but that their success will not bear comparison with that of the early missions admits not of question, and some reasonable account of the difference ought to be assigned. But, in truth, this parallel, though suggesting a very striking proof of the insufficiency of the period assigned by such authors as Strauss and Renan for the 'completion and reception' of the 'Christian legend,' is, in fact, far too indulgent to their theory; for, in the modern parallel, we have at least not represented our enthusiastic missionaries as unconsciously *manufacturing* their own legendary faith at the very moment they are propagating it, and converting themselves and the world to the truth of their 'legends' at the same time! According to the infidel theory, the 'legends' were not only originated and completed, but obtained currency and acceptance among vast multi-

tudes of the many nations throughout the Roman Empire, in this scanty space of about seventy or a hundred years, and that in the broad daylight of an advanced civilisation! Is this in analogy with the ordinary 'mythologies' which have been formed so gradually, and in ages so remote, that we can only guess at their origin?

M. Renan is fond of appealing to the legendary achievements of Francis d'Assisi, as showing what incredible fictions may grow up about a saintly enthusiast. The absurdity of any such parallel is manifest at a glance. The 'miracles' of St. Francis were all such as his adherents, who already believed in his religious system, and that that system could boast of a hundred such miracle-workers, were prepared to receive. Such recitals of miracles as those which garnish the life of St. Francis, are amongst those which Paley, with equal candour and acuteness, says, 'we may at once lay out of account,' when examining miraculous claims. The early converts to Christianity —converts from the most various religions, naturally attached to their native superstitions, and as necessarily opposed to the pretensions of the upstart Gospel—were not, like the followers of St. Francis, predisposed to gulp down everything offered to their credulity. The *real* parallel would be, to find multitudes of *Protestants* of all denominations acquiescing in the miraculous claims of St. Francis; this would

be a little like the case of Jews or Gentiles receiving the miracles of the Gospel in the first instance; and that *that* could not be very easily effected by ordinary means, the Jews and Gentiles *now* will afford us just as good a proof as could Jews and Gentiles then. And lastly, if among the Protestants whom we have imagined devoutly receiving the miracles of St. Francis, there were found men of the acutest intellect and the highest culture—men who, in days of light like ours, were as difficult to be disabused of their senseless belief in the miracles of that saint as are the Lockes, the Newtons, the Butlers, and thousands more, (high in the rolls of science and literature), to be disabused of their obstinate faith in the Gospel 'legends,' then the parallel would be tolerably perfect. In a word, no miracles alleged by the votaries of a system already implicitly believed in, and vouched for by those whose prejudices and passions predispose them to an easy assent, can touch the present case; and to argue as if it did, is one of the most vulgar of fallacies.

On some important grounds we are not sorry to see this 'new version' of the 'Origines du Christianisme.' It is a sign of the restless distrust with which infidelity regards the many solutions of the problem it has already attempted. It is evident that M. Renan is not satisfied to rest where Strauss did, and where Strauss himself rests no longer. The problem is—Given, that there neither are nor can be such things

as either miracle or prophecy,—in short, such a thing as the '*surnaturel*,'—how shall we account satisfactorily for the rapid, yet imperceptible formation, in about seventy years and in an historic age, of such a prodigious deposit of the most extraordinary 'legends' about the Jewish 'carpenter,' Jesus Christ; and their ready reception, as *historic* verities, by immense numbers of the most various nations and races, in spite of all the natural prejudices of these religionists, both in *favour* of their own religions and *against* the new; to say nothing of objections to the 'marvellous legends' themselves? To this difficulty must be added that of accounting for the fact that these really idle and baseless 'legends' should be supported by such plausible evidences as not only to produce, *then*, an intensity of belief which made multitudes rather part with life itself than part with *them*, but to impose on vast multitudes of the strongest and acutest minds for more than eighteen centuries; of men who have spent years in the investigation of these asserted 'legends,' and written whole libraries in maintenance of their being historic truth! No wonder that infidelity feels it to be a difficult task to give a good account of these legends. Yet it *ought* not to be so, if they are nothing more. In an historic age like ours, nothing is more easy than to dispel 'legends;' nothing, in any age, more difficult than to make nations and races tolerate, or even look, except with scornful

curiosity, upon *any* legends that are not of native growth.

The difficulty of the problem is confessed by the versatile construction and speedy abandonment of the most various and even contradictory hypotheses for solving it. Coarse fraud, cheating the credulity of the world; fanaticism, cheating both the world and itself; enthusiasm (sublimed to madness and bereft of all its senses), perpetually, but *honestly*, mistaking ordinary occurrences for miraculous events,—a theory which none has more successfully laughed out of countenance than Strauss himself; 'legends' gradually springing up, no one knows when or how, and rapidly believed, no one knows how or why; lastly, fanaticism, enthusiasm, innocent mistake, pious fraud, and gradual 'legend,' taken together and mingled in various proportions;—all these have been alternately urged and abandoned by a scepticism which feels itself compelled to give some *rationale* of the origin and success of Christianity, and feels perpetually dissatisfied with its own efforts; and, we venture to say, will do so. For, as Butler truly says, 'The miracles are a satisfactory account of the events, of which no other satisfactory account can be given; nor any account at all, but what is imaginary merely, and invented.'

M. Renan's is another of these 'merely imaginary' solutions, and we have no doubt will soon be dismissed, like so many that have preceded it, as utterly unsatisfactory.

LETTER TO M. D.

ON SOME RECENT SPECULATIONS TOUCHING THE SCIENTIFIC POTHEOSIS OF MAN.

LETTER TO M. D.

ON SOME RECENT SPECULATIONS TOUCHING THE SCIENTIFIC APOTHEOSIS OF MAN.

I HAVE read the Essay of the brilliant, though eccentric, Frenchman from which you promised me so much satisfaction, if not conviction. I am happy to find that though we are at present living 'without God in the world,' in a different sense from that of the New Testament, and must be content to do so during the long minority of that Baby-God, Man; yet, that he is gradually developing into a Divinity, and will occupy the throne of empire, when he has (as he is destined to do) deciphered all the mysteries, read all the riddles, and solved all the problems of the universe! When he has done all that, I quite agree that he will be one.

In the Essay itself I find but scant trace of the present obliteration of any of the differences between the Divine and Human. There is here and there, I confess, a truly Delphic mysticism which is worthy of

an oracle; but everything that *can* be understood, has a distinct flavour of the purely mortal mind about it. I acknowledge, indeed, and ungrudgingly, the brilliancy of illustration and of style, and the plausibility of the reasoning, in many parts; for I feel that I can do as much as this without in the smallest degree losing sight of the immense interval between the Divine and Human: just as Sydney Smith said he could, generously and without envy, allow to the poor brutes the uttermost that can be claimed for them without any danger of compromising the unquestionable superiority of man: 'I feel so sure,' says he, 'that the blue ape without a tail will never rival us in poetry, painting, and music, that I see no reason whatever why justice may not be done to the few fragments of soul and tatters of understanding which they may really possess. I have sometimes felt a little uneasy at Exeter 'Change from contrasting the monkeys with the 'prentice boys who are teasing them; but a few pages of Locke, or a few lines of Milton, have always restored me to tranquillity, and convinced me that the superiority of man had nothing to fear.'

I have likewise read the article in which we are so naïvely told that 'Practically, without a doubt, the mind of man is *infinite*!'—a fact of which I not only continue to doubt, but of which I fancy this very article sufficiently proves the contrary.

But to address myself to you:—

I cannot agree with you in those hopes of the universal triumphs of human science in which you so fondly indulge; that is, that the time will come when science will 'prophesy,' when its 'previsions' will not only give us more or less sagacious guesses at the future, but when, by reducing all phenomena to *known* and *necessary* laws, and thus anticipating all the antecedents of future events, it will tell us what will be the character of the coming seasons, what the quality of the next harvest, what the causes and remedies of disease, and what the condition of any given nation fifty years hence: in other words, that we shall be able to write future history as if it were already past! If this should ever be the case, then will I acknowledge that your dream of man's gradually becoming that God whom you fondly imagine to be as yet only a-making, has some plausible foundation, and that we may well 'confess' unto him that 'his own right arm can save him!'

One thing, meantime, I would say to you here. It is, that one of your masters, M. Comte, on whom you profess to rely so much, by no means promises all this; on the contrary, he often expressly admits, in relation to those more complicated sciences—for example, sociology and meteorology—which more immediately affect man's welfare, and in which, if he had but accurate knowledge, such knowledge would become

stupendous power, that the phenomena are so multiform and intricate, so subtle and variable, that perhaps man can hardly ever hope to bring them under the expression of absolutely accurate laws. The science of meteorology, in particular, he denies to be a science at all.

But I would not be misunderstood, nor seem to forget what I have devoutly believed ever since (when a young man of your own age) I first read Bacon: that the knowledge man is to acquire of the works of God is indefinite; that, as the 'Minister and Interpreter of Nature,' he will go on from age to age deciphering more and more of that huge scroll of hieroglyphics. I believe, as Boyle puts it, that 'The book of nature is a fine and large piece of tapestry rolled up, which we are not able to see all at once, but must be content to wait for the discovery of its beauty and symmetry little by little, as it gradually comes to be more and more unfolded or displayed.' I fully believe that more and more of this will be disclosed to the curious and devout gaze of man as time goes on; that he will attain a larger and larger knowledge of phenomena, and of the laws which govern them; and also that he will more and more subordinate them to his use, and turn knowledge into power.

You will say, 'What difference is there between us, then?' I answer, 'Much every way;' or rather the difference is *infinite*. I think that however much

man may know, there will still be infinitely more of which he will be ignorant; that as his sphere of illumination spreads, it will but disclose a still larger periphery of surrounding darkness; and that within that darkness will always lie the conditions of the complete *scientific* solution of the problems you have referred to. You will perhaps rejoin, 'How so, if the observations of man can be carried on *without limit*?' I answer, that each additional element introduced into most of those problems you have mentioned, will, even by that very accumulation of observations which is essential to their solution, only make them the more hopelessly dark; for every new element will be a new variable, and a problem of an indefinite number of variables becomes unmanageable to the *human intellect*. It is the nature of the problems, relatively to the human intellect, that makes me say they are insoluble. I do not put any limit to man's power of observing, recording, classifying facts; of saying that this, that, or the other (to a million of elements, if you will), is concerned in the production of a given event; but that no one mind—and *one* mind is essential—can deal with them in combination, and solve the transcendental equations to which they give rise. It is in vain to say in such a case, that there is no limit to the observations which successive generations of philosophers and *savans* may record: it is true; but there is, in none of them, the mind that can

simultaneously comprehend, analyse, and deductively reason upon them.

Nor will it, for the reason just hinted at, do to say that this force may be supplied by indefinite *combinations* of the minds which are engaged in collecting the data. A combination of minds cannot do the work, if only because you cannot give unity of effort and execution to the combination. What is wanted is, —adequate power in some *one* mind, of simultaneously surveying and dealing with all the conditions of such problems. The sum of the muscular force of an indefinite number of men, might be sufficient to lift Mont Blanc; but the task would still be impossible, because there would be no possibility of giving it unity of direction and application. Nay, there is no limit to the degree of force which may reside in a host of fleas or pismires, if you do but multiply them indefinitely; their aggregate powers shall exceed any assignable sum of force—be more than sufficient to pull down the pyramid of Cheops. Yet it is certain that they never could do so, because it would be impossible to effect the requisite combination, or give the necessary direction and unity of application to this force. It is much the same with the problems in question. What is wanted is, not merely millions of separate facts and observations, but an intellectual power equal to the task of combining and reasoning deductively upon them,—a mind capable of

dealing with a problem into which enter millions of variables! I cannot concede, indeed, except for argument's sake, that, *in general*, even all the single elements necessary for the solution of any such problem can be exhaustively observed and catalogued by man; many of them may well be so remote or so subtle (and yet exerting a real influence on others within his ken, and on the result) as to elude all sagacity and research. In the science of meteorology, for example, which, as I have said, your admired Comte denies to be a science at all, and despairingly admits that it must ever be *empirical*, some of the elements necessary to give the character of the weather for even a very near date, may be subterranean, and connected with processes and changes of which it is not possible to know anything; others, in regions of the atmosphere, where, though comparatively little above us, our eyes and our instruments cannot follow them; others, in portions of the trackless deserts of air and ocean, equally inaccessible to the philosopher. Many of them, again, are so remote from one another, that though not inaccessible singly, they would require a multitude of observers *simultaneously* recording and communicating their observations over whole oceans and continents, and giving the transcendental mathematician who should have the task of working out the resultant, in direction and magnitude, of all these numberless and ever-varying

forces, a sort of *ubiquitousness*. But on all this I do not insist: what I contend for is, that if the observation and enumeration of the elements of these problems were ever so complete, we have not the power of dealing with them: 'they are,' as Butler says in his 'Sermon on the Ignorance of Man,' 'beyond the human faculties.' Those elements are so many, so complex, so subtle, so variable, so interdependent; they so act and inter-act in endless involution; they propagate their effects through such long successions in point of time, and over such remote distances in point of space, that nothing less than that Omniscience which first arranged and still controls them, is equal to the task.

I thankfully acknowledge, that within certain *very near* limits, God has given man indications which, though seldom yielding absolute certitude, suffice to afford a *probable* guide in the duty of the day that is passing over him; suffice to justify sagacious conjectures, and to ensure probable safety. Thus, to recur to the example of meteorology;—sudden changes in the barometer, indicating great and wide-spread disturbance in that immense ocean of elastic fluid by which we are surrounded, and at no very remote distance, warn us that the effects will be soon felt in the locality of the observer. But even then the precise direction and nature of the tempest are seldom capable of being estimated; and the

interval between the 'sign' and the phenomenon is often so very small, that, as Admiral Fitzroy acknowledges, it is often a race between the cyclone and his signal, not to say that sometimes the cyclone comes to a particular locality before it. It is, I grant, well worth while to take the uttermost pains to obtain a probable knowledge of the weather of even the next twelve or twenty-four hours; we ought thankfully to confess the benefit of having strong probability,—'that guide of life,' as Butler calls it,—to give us light as to our immediate duty and immediate safety. And do not suppose that I for a moment underrate such a benefit. But such a momentary gleam of light on the passing hour no more resembles your boasted Orb of Science illuminating the wide field of the future, than the flash of lightning which revealed to Captain Cook the vessel on which he was driving in the midnight darkness of the tempest, resembles the sun at noon-day. All such quasi-knowledge extends to a very short period, and instead of being the result of a complete or exhaustive analysis of meteorological phenomena, depends on a very few decisive symptoms,—especially the readings of the barometer. On the other hand, the attempt to deal with any considerable interval, in a climate where the phenomena of the weather are at all complex, utterly baffles all human sagacity. Even when such calculations extend to only two or three days (generally determined, by the

way. by the mere empirical appearances of the stability or fickleness of the weather on the day that is passing), we as often see the prophecies falsified as verified, or only very approximate results obtained. As to the next season, or the next year, all will allow that, *at present*, 'prevision' is out of the question, and I believe always will be. The same may be said, I think, of those other problems you have mentioned; and as you merely prophesy, I will venture to prophesy in my turn, that man will never be able to tell with *certainty* the weather of the next six months, or the character of the next harvest; to give an infallible prognosis of the issue of any disease, at its commencement; or to determine the life of any individual, or the future history of any community. If you say we can conjecture in these cases with more or less probability, I grant it. Men have always done so, and in many cases done it with much sagacity. In some cases we may all do so with not a little assurance of moral certitude; as, for example, in predicting that a very extensive empire will one day fall to pieces. Yet, even in such cases, the form, the time, the immediate causes, the direction, the magnitude of the anticipated changes, are generally altogether unimagined. But guesses, however sagacious or plausible, are not *science*, nor that which you promise yourself from your favourite writers; nor are predictions that may be falsified as often as not, veritable pro-

phecy. What should we say of mathematical science, if we only knew that in an unknown number of cases, but not in all, its propositions would be found true? —that we might sometimes predicate truly, though sometimes falsely, that a given triangle had its three angles equal to two right angles?

And this naturally leads me to notice the gross fallacy by which, as I imagine, you impose on yourself, when you suppose, with some of your favourite authors, that a 'law of averages,' founded on the sedulous investigation of *statistics*, will give you the scientific certitude you seek. Permit me to remind you that science, *truly* so called, knows nothing of averages: we do not speak of mathematical propositions as being on an 'average' true; nor of gravity as being on an 'average' a uniformly accelerating force. *Averages* always imply as much ignorance as knowledge, and show that we have not science;—for which indeed we substitute them.

When, for example, man acts upon a calculation of averages, and attempts to guard against unpleasant contingencies by their means, he but provides a contrivance which his *ignorance* necessitates him to resort to, but which true science, that is, real knowledge, would disdain. Take, for instance, life insurance. People insure, not because they know that about one out of every forty, or some twenty-five out of every thousand, will die every year, but because they do *not*

know where the deaths will fall; and therefore resolve to share among them the incidence of calamities, by each paying his quota towards a mitigation of them. If a man knew that he would live till eighty, he would, unless a fool, never insure in early life at all, for he must inevitably be a loser: and if it were known to an insurance company that he would die at twenty, they would never insure him, for in that case *they* would be losers. He and they act as they do, not only because they are ignorant as well as knowing, but because they are *more* ignorant than knowing; they know only that they do *not* know on whom a certain inevitable calamity may fall, and they agree to share together and so soften its effects, rather than let them all fall upon one. If that 'golden age' of which your theorists dream should ever arrive, and man really attain that 'prevision' of what are now contingencies, to which they so presumptuously aspire, this artifice of wisdom founded on the statistics of 'average' will justly appear nothing better than a rude and barbarous contrivance; and as illustrating man's ignorance far better than his knowledge. But we are far enough, I apprehend, from any such era of 'prevision' at present.

And here I may remark, that invaluable as are carefully compiled statistics as a foundation of the law of averages, the value assigned them by Mr. Buckle as a foundation of the science you aspire to, is altogether preposterous. They throw no light, as he pretends, on

the *laws* of phenomena, but merely record the average facts. See how palpably he confounds these things! He says that philosophers and metaphysicians had long speculated profoundly but very fruitlessly on that great mystery, the cause of the balance so exactly maintained between the proportions of the sexes in the world; that it never entered people's heads just to ascertain and register the numerical results; that no sooner was that done, than the *law* disclosed itself, and it became manifest that for about every twenty-one females there were about twenty males born into the world! Surely to this ridiculous statement it is obvious to reply that the two things compared,—the imputed failure and the fancied success,—have no more to do with one another than a 'cat and a fiddle.' Were the one ever so ignominious and the other ever so glorious, they have no relation one to another.

It was doubtless very absurd, because very impracticable, for philosophers to attempt to penetrate the causes of this great mystery of Providence; but their object was a totally different one from that for which alone we go to the *statistical tables*,—which merely tell us more exactly a fact the world never doubted of. These tables throw no light on what the physiologists attempted to penetrate;—they leave us just where we were as to the *law* in question: and as to the fact they *do* inform us of, though very important, it is but a fact of which (though statistical tables more

accurately announce it) not one of these derided 'speculators'—no, nor in truth any mortal from the time of Adam downwards—ever doubted for a moment; that is, that men and women were numerically about equal in the world! They could not say, indeed, until these more exact statistics told them, that the numbers were in this precise ratio; but of the approximate ratio no one who looked on a dozen families, and could count his fingers, ever had the smallest doubt. It was known with such approximate accuracy, that the more exact knowledge has never made men act differently *after* the knowledge from what they did *before*. Did any one ever hear of a gentleman hastily proposing to a lady lest there should not be in his community any woman left for him to take, or of a lady precipitately closing with the offer of a gentleman for a similar reason? About the fact—which is all we know *now*, though statistics enable us to state it more unexceptionably—the world was never in any the smallest doubt, either before or since Mr. Buckle wrote; and as for the rationale of the law, (which is what the physiologists whom he derides were attempting to find out,) it leaves us just as ignorant as we were before; an ignorance in which we are likely to remain, in spite of all the statistics in the world. Your statistics will be indeed an invaluable help, in the humble sphere assigned to man—that of calculating probability; an extra lantern in the hand of that 'Guide

of Life;' but they will not give you the absolute science—the 'prevision,' founded on an exhaustive analysis of all the 'antecedents'—to which you presumptuously aspire.

But the futility of any such expectations is, as I think I have already shown, abundantly proved, even from the very principle on which you professedly indulge them. A perfect knowledge of all the antecedents of coming events is plainly impossible; yet without that, there can be no such thing as perfect prevision. The great and the little, nay, the very greatest events and the very least, are so interconnected and interdependent—the great wheels and the little wheels so play into one another in this prodigious machinery—that it implies a knowledge of the most minute details, as well as of the average laws of the mass of events, to come to any clear certitude at all. A great statesman, who has long swayed the destinies of his own country, as well as to a great extent those of Europe, goes out for an hour's ride on his horse, and his horse stumbles over a pebble; he is thrown, and in eight-and-forty hours is dead. Had it not been for that pebble, who can say how the politics of his own country, and of Europe, might have been affected for years to come? Another great statesman who has inaugurated a new fiscal policy, and is still in his prime, is hastily getting out of the way of an approaching railway train, misses his footing

in a momentary panic—and is gone! A great soldier, the hope and darling of his country, who in the very youth of his career has achieved a hundred victories, is, through an incomprehensible blunder, shot by his own soldiers, leaving his countrymen to acknowledge that in his loss they had suffered a heavier defeat than if they had failed in that great victory which he had at that moment done so much to ensure! It is in vain to say that the general course and march of events would have been the same whether such contingencies had intervened or not. It is sufficient to reply that to absolute science there must be no such contingencies: and that even if, for argument's sake, it were conceded that the general course of events would be the same, it is impossible to say how their march might be retarded or the results modified.

And as a knowledge of the very minutest of the antecedents of these events, is as necessary as that of the very greatest, to secure a really scientific 'prevision' of the future; so, if that knowledge *can* be obtained, there is no reason why you should not expect, not merely to prophesy history, but to prophesy biography also; and to write off each man's life, if you please, as well as the life of nations! Now, I think even you will hardly have the hardihood to deny, that if this be a just logical inference, we arrive at a *reductio ad absurdum.*

But, in truth, the proverbial mist which in the world of politics covers even the nearest horizon; which leaves us in utter uncertainty from day to day, and extorts from the lips of the most experienced statecraftsmen of all ages, a perpetual confession that their science is little better than the art of plausible guessing, ought to rebuke these follies of an overweening speculation. Look abroad upon the troubled ocean of European or American politics at this moment.* How many perplexed state-pilots would hail the Pharos of your 'prevision,' casting its light upon the deep! But is there one of them who hopes ever to see it?

Of the vanity of such hopes as those you now entertain, he who, next to Comte, I suspect, has most fed them, was himself a proof. With the utmost confidence he projected a work (which if completed must have gone to fifty folios at least) in which he proposed to inaugurate the 'Science of History,' and to breathe into men the spirit of prophecy, even if he did not prophesy himself. He had not completed his first volume, before he was compelled to feel the work was altogether too gigantic for him, or for any one man; and soon after he had finished the second, passed away, leaving but a fragment of the monument he had intended to rear. That fragment exhibits quite as

* January, 1864. Just before the attack of Prussia and Austria on Denmark, and in the midst of the American war.

much the narrowness and prejudice, the ignorance and presumption, of the author, as it does his acuteness, industry, or learning. As to the general results of any such speculations, I strongly recommend to your attention the following sentence from an able review of his last volume :*—

'"It were infinite," said Lord Bacon, "to judge the causes of causes, and their impulsions one of another." To embrace this infinite series is in the power of Omniscience alone ; and as the omission of a single unit in an intricate calculation disturbs the whole result, so, in the great reckoning of human history, no positive general knowledge can be reached without faculties far surpassing those of man. In the divine order of the universe, doubtless each particular event, becoming in its turn the cause of innumerable other events, has its appropriate place and object ; and the great mystery of creation is that every event conspires to advance the progress of the whole, although the freedom of the will of intelligent beings remains unfettered in all parts.'

Of the feeble power of man to deal with unknown relations, even where the field is very limited, and limited too by himself, we have recently had a striking specimen ; given, by-the-bye, at the very time these vague aspirations towards universal science were cropping out, and as if on purpose to rebuke them.

* 'Edinburgh Review,' vol. cxiv., p. 211.

I refer to the history of that unlucky ship, the 'Great Eastern.' Compared with the problems which *you* aspire to solve, the task man here imposed on himself was a mere trifle. The object was very definite, and all the conditions of success or failure were strictly within the limits either of pure science, or of those applied sciences in which man justly boasts of having introduced mathematical accuracy; they were questions of pure calculation, founded on the laws of equilibrium and of motion, and the powers of resistance and tenacity of given materials, and in given forms and combinations. It is now seen that in many instances the anticipations did not correspond to experience; and that the project, limited as it was, leaped to conclusions which, if ever to be prudently aimed at at all, man could only creep and crawl to by a slow process.

It is now impossible to read the programme of her anticipated triumphs before she was launched (I was reading one of the most interesting of them only the other day), without a feeling of mingled shame and wonder as we remember the disastrous course of her subsequent history. It is one long series of revelations of the inability of man to anticipate the unknown relations which are disclosed in the experimental tests of any vast but untried scheme. The ambitious grandeur of the project, and the wonderful amount of skill, forethought, and perseverance

expended on it, contrasted with the humiliating blunders and oversights, and the disastrous results, read like an impressive illustration of Pascal's sublime musings on the combined 'Greatness and Misery of Man.' Never was there a trophy of man's science and skill more conspicuous; never a failure more ignominious.

But the crowning paradox of that dream of a scientific millennium in which Man, who you say contains within himself the germ of the *coming* Deity, is to be something worthy of the name, is this;—that so far as any light of present experience goes, this poor Deity's attributes will lie farther and farther apart, as time rolls on, and can never be brought together. The theoretic perfection and the practical value of his knowledge are, it may easily be shown, in inverse ratio!

'Science is prevision,' you say, and 'prevision is power.' Very well; but first, how far will the 'prevision' go; and when it is ever so accurate, is it always attended with a corresponding power? Now in each case it may be shown there is a very near limit which proves man to be quite as much the baby of the universe as the God of it.

To take the last point first. Are our 'previsions' always attended with a corresponding power? Look at the phenomena of astronomy, the most perfect of the sciences; that to which the strictest rules of mathematical demonstration have been applied, and which, as regards our own system, is perhaps nearly

as perfect as it will ever be. Now with reference to this science, I suppose it is abundantly clear that the proposition, that knowledge is power, is to be received only within certain very modest limits. It is a comparatively small part of the phenomena that can be turned into sources of power, (none of them can be at all altered by us,) compared with the immense range of the science. The phenomena are best known of all; but unluckily they are out of our reach; or rather luckily, otherwise we should certainly have some philosopher trying whether he could not make the clockwork of the sun and moon go a little better; or fix planets and comets in new orbits, just for the sake of a few verifications of the truths of celestial dynamics; and so we might have the universe brought about our ears some fine morning! Sure I am that M. Comte might feel justified in making the most perilous experiments; for he believed that the 'heavens declare no other glory' than that of Hipparchus and Newton, and that some notable improvements might be suggested in the constitution of the universe! It is well therefore that man is restricted, in making his experiments, to little bits of mineral and metal; and that he cannot verify the darling hypotheses of his inquisitive mind on the greater phenomena of the universe,—which are happily kept out of his reach, just as we put anything we do not wish to see broken out of reach of a monkey.

Well, then, in this science of astronomy, in which man knows most, and most perfectly, he can apply very few of his facts, compared with those he knows, and can modify them not at all. They are all placed immeasurably beyond him. He can predict the reappearance of a comet or the occurrence of a transit for hundreds of years after he will be dust; he can calculate the moment of an eclipse a thousand years hence; but he can neither retard nor accelerate nor modify the phenomena. He is a perfect prophet so far; he has 'prevision;' but he can do nothing.

Take the other case: as to whether his 'previsions' will go far. In the sciences that most nearly concern us—meteorology, medicine, politics, and so forth—the phenomena are so complicated, so evanescent, and so run into one another, depend on such an infinity of causes, and have such an infinity of relations, that even M. Comte himself doubts whether we shall ever be so happy as to obtain prevision of more than *averages* of events; yet here, if man had but knowledge, he could do much, for the phenomena are close to him. So that it appears that this illustrious Human God, that is to be, knows most accurately when he can do little or nothing, and knows little or nothing where, if he did know, he could do much! This eccentric deity has his attributes unluckily in different places, and cannot put them together; omniscient, but powerless in the skies; all-

powerful, if he were not so ignorant, on the earth! The astronomer can compute with utmost accuracy the elements of a planet's orbit, or the curve in which a comet is moving; but meantime, poor soul! is not aware that he is all the time taking a terrible cold during his freezing operations, which in ten days is to put an end to all his observations. His 'phenomena' go on, though he cannot alter them; and yet though he foresaw them, he did not foresee that he would not see them! On the other hand, the doctor knows that his patient has something very wrong going on inside him; but for his life cannot tell what. It may be 'functional,' he says; it may be 'organic;' it may be a tumour of fifteen different species, and all with very learned names; but it is so latent that he cannot reach it, except by taking his patient to pieces, which is the very thing that he wishes to prevent the said tumour from doing. He hardly dares to do anything to the mysterious fabric of solids and fluids, and if he does anything is almost certain that he will do mischief. The phenomena are beyond his ken, and he cannot effectually know them. Meantime his patient dies; and the doctor then demonstrates, with exceeding satisfaction to himself, and abundant uselessness to the world, that it was a hopeless matter from the beginning—as he had plausibly conjectured; that if it could but be known with certainty when such a thing is coming on, and what it is, something

might be done! So that we may say, not only that the phenomena man knows best, he cannot modify, and the phenomena he could modify, he cannot know; but that in the former his knowledge is so accurate that he can predict, though he cannot hasten or prevent, effects; while in the latter, in which if he did but know he could do something, and often a great deal, his knowledge is very apt to come *after* the event. *Le plaisant Dieu que voila!*

No doubt *all* things—the great and the little—have their fixed relations, but only Omniscience can assign and manipulate with them. To Him there would be no absurdity in the problem, 'Given an atom, to show the history of the planet of which it forms a part:' or, 'Given any thing, to find any other thing.' Now this, in reality, is what you folks who hope for perfect 'prevision,' and entire independence of God, aspire to;—a problem still more hopeless than that old one, 'Given the name of a ship and the number of her crew, to find her destination!'

The error is not in supposing that there are not fixed relations among all events, for 'God geometrizes,' as Barrow sublimely said; all things to Him have weight and measure. But to suppose that, *because* all events have their fixed relations, man's little brain can hold the huge conditions of these problems and differentiate and integrate among millions of variables, is an error of the same kind as if a philo-

sopher should suppose that because there must certainly be so many gallons of water in the ocean, or so many and a fraction over, that therefore they might all be got into a quart bottle!

The Bible, in this as in other cases, teaches us the truest philosophy as well as the truest religion, and gives us no *half*-truth. 'He who spake as never man spake' has instructed us, at one and the same time, to confide in the great Father's wisdom, and to distrust our own. He tells us that there are indeed fixed relations among all events, and that we may depend on the stability and uniformity of God's *general* laws; that seed-time and harvest, and summer and winter, shall never fail; that the very hairs of our head are all noted in *His* table of statistics, and that not a sparrow can fall to the ground except as ordained by Him; and yet teaches us, in order to maintain our sense of humility and dependence, the momentous truth, that we 'know not what a day or an hour shall bring forth.'

For my own part, while I believe with you in man's *indefinite* (not infinite) progress in knowledge, I am not ashamed to say that I look for it only in virtue of those conditions which He who has made him has imposed, and which befit the posture and capacities of a dependent and finite nature. I believe with those who have hitherto been accounted among the wisest of men, that the consciousness of our ignorance

is one of the most precious parts of knowledge, and the sincere confession of it one of the surest proofs of wisdom. I believe also that that may be said of the conditions of progress in all science which Burke, speaking of our ancestors, says so beautifully of the conditions of progress in political science: 'Not being illuminated with the light of which the gentlemen of France tell us they have got so abundant a share, they acted on a strong impression of the ignorance and fallibility of mankind. And He that had made them thus fallible, rewarded them for having, in their conduct, attended to their nature.'

A

'VISION' ABOUT 'PREVISION;

OR (AS SOCRATES SAYS),

'A DREAM FOR A DREAM.'

A

VISION' ABOUT 'PREVISION;

OR (AS SOCRATES SAYS),

A DREAM FOR A DREAM.'

LET it not be supposed that religion alone makes demands on our faith. Science just now, or at least what often usurps that name, is quite as exacting. Some of its prophecies are as hard to be believed as any in the Old or New Testaments; and its dazzling visions of the 'Promised Land' into which it is about to lead its 'chosen race' of *savans*,—where they are to revel in omniscient knowledge and supreme dominion over nature,—are absolutely overpowering. One feels inclined to cry out with Gray's Bard, under the oppression of these Apocalyptic splendours,—

> 'Visions of glory, spare my aching sight,—
> Ye unborn ages, crowd not on my soul.'

Of course, I do not for one moment imagine that the many eminent men of our day,—more numerous

than at any former period,—who with patient humility, and gentle and modest solicitation of nature, are pursuing the inductive philosophy in the footsteps of Bacon, do otherwise than smile at the ignorant raptures indulged in by many a tyro who, it may be, has read a short paper on the 'Habits of the Field Mouse' before a local Society, or presented a small collection of butterflies and cockle-shells to a local museum, or is made happy by having got admission for some bombastic predictions of the coming scientific discomfiture of all 'creeds and theologies,' in some local print. Nevertheless, this enthusiasm of spurious science,—spurious emphatically, since it idly boasts of what it *will* do, in that spirit of presumption which is exactly antipodal to true science,—is becoming quite a nuisance. 'Science,' says one, 'is the providence of man.' 'Science,' says another, 'is to sweep the world clean of all historical and traditional faiths.' 'Science,' says a third, 'is to banish all belief in miracles, and all notions of the supernatural.' 'Science,' says a fourth, 'will show the needlessness and absurdity of all religious hypotheses, when man has fully outgrown the theological stage of development. It will prove that the universe is nothing but a necessary evolution, in virtue of a law of cosmical order' (though 'comical' would be the right word, since it is a law requiring no Legislator), 'which makes the idea of a creation as superfluous as it is ridiculous.' 'Science,'

says a fifth, bolder still, 'will gradually extinguish all idea of a "God," for which, when science is perfected, it will substitute that of the true Être Suprême;'—that great *Mumbo Jumbo*, that august many-headed 'singular-plural' Deity, the 'Collective Humanity,'—at once God and worshipper! 'Science,' says a sixth, 'will in due time penetrate all mysteries, untwist all intricacies in the so-called web of "causes and effects," show the interdependence and relation of all physical and (as some say) moral phenomena, and giving man powers in proportion to his knowledge, make him master of his own destiny; enable him to read the future almost as readily as the past, and to write history in the shape of prophecy.' One almost expects to hear that science is to abolish death, discover the 'philosopher's stone' and the 'elixir vitæ,' and give us copious draughts of the 'aurum potabile.' Most assuredly, many of the promises made in its behalf by some of its more sanguine disciples are just as void of all foundation,—many of its conclusions just as empty of all premises,—as the dreams of ancient alchemy and astrology. In the eagerness with which many sciolists welcome any extravagant theory, which but promises enough and prophesies enough, without one particle of experimental evidence to sanction it, the very principles of all inductive science are simply set at defiance.

In no direction is this overweening spirit more

manifest than in the hopes of that 'prevision' of even the remote future, which 'young science' so often promises us. Many are anticipating that the privilege of loosing the clasps of the iron-bound book of destiny, and of translating its hieroglyphics, is to be the dower of advancing knowledge.

Ingenious meteorologists are giving us—not merely reasonable warnings of impending tempests, warnings which barometrical indications and other probable signs of imminent change doubtless justify; not merely modest, though necessarily vague and general, forecasts of the *probable* weather of the next day or two, founded on the evidence of the phenomena of the passing day (which may be all very well too); but, *mirabile dictu*! the diary of the weather for a twelvemonth in advance;—for what particular point of space is another matter. If such a diary is to be of any use, we ought to have one for every few square miles, certainly for every parallel of latitude; since a moderate railway journey of a couple of hundred miles or so will often give us all the varieties of sunshine and cloud, moist and dry, rain and drought, wind and calm on the very same morning. However, the thing is done for somewhere or other, and will, like Old Moore's Almanack, be always true for somewhere or other. But though professedly founded on a *scientific* basis, there is no presumption in saying, that, (as with the above-named almanack,) exact science, and precise

data for deduction and calculation, have had little to do with such attempts, and idle conjecture just as much.

Again; it was only the other day that I read in one of our provincial prints, a prediction that science would be enabled by-and-bye, in virtue of 'statistics' (to which many seem to attach the same mystical virtue as the Jews to their Cabala), to predict the year in which another Shakspeare or Milton will be born into the world; the exact period, the completion of a cycle, when such a 'rara avis' is *due*—much in the same way as we may predict the return of a comet, all whose elements have been subjected to mathematical calculation! In another journal I saw strong exhortations to study the remotest problems of 'pre-historic' archæology, not merely as highly curious in themselves, and, therefore, well worthy (as they are) of the most diligent study, but as an indispensable condition of the knowledge of the remote future! How the raking into Danish 'kitchen-middens,' or the most accurate application of the craniometer to presumed 'pre-historic' skulls, can effectually aid us in casting the horoscope of the future, is not very intelligible; and considering the more than Egyptian darkness which still surrounds all the 'pre-historic' ages — the hubbub of indistinct mutterings which issues from those depths, and to which science gives the most discordant interpretations,—our utter inability to measure 'pre-historic'

antiquity for want of what Scaliger truly calls the basis of *any* history, the chronological unit,—in this case, a unit of geologic time;—considering these things, I say, the above exhortation really sounds like telling us to light our candles at the ashes of old Tubal-cain's forge-fire, or to go into a coal-cellar to see the sun rise! However, the notion was in obvious though unavowed harmony with the theory which had evidently taken possession of the mind of the speculator;—that since man *is to be* gifted with universal knowledge, (of the future included,) and as everything in this wonderful 'cosmos' is connected with everything else—one stage of development with another—so, a knowledge of the whole interdependence of things, or, as Butler would say, 'of all things from everlasting to everlasting,' becomes essential to such knowledge; and therefore man must have a perfectly accurate knowledge of the past if he would attain to an accurate 'prevision' of the remote future. And no doubt this is true; but whilst most persons would say, 'Then good-bye to the hopes of man's universal knowledge,' our more adventurous, though I admit, for the most part, youthful speculators, are by no means daunted. True though it may be, that the really *scientific* knowledge of the future implies a really scientific knowledge of all things past and present, *that*, it seems, is merely a reason why man should be exhorted with all convenient speed to get it! It would be more natural, one

would imagine,—more in keeping with the caution of the inductive philosophy,—to abstain at present from such speculations; to abstain until some thousands, or perhaps millions, of years had afforded at least some plausible indications that the applications in question would ever be possible. Even those astronomers who settled it that the stars are nothing but nebulæ condensed into solid globes, did yet at least require the nebulæ to speculate with; and surely it would not be too much to ask that those sages who hope to illuminate the depths of the remote future by lights derived from the depths of primeval time, should at least see some faint nebulous streaks in the region of 'Chaos and Old Night,' before indulging in these visions of the ultimate achievements of science.

While there is nothing, absolutely nothing, as far as I know, to be alleged for this purely modern presumption of man's ultimately mastering the secrets of futurity, and, as some expressly say, becoming virtually his own God, or at all events the *only* God that ever is to be, I have endeavoured in the preceding paper to show, not only how purely gratuitous are any such anticipations, but how utterly opposed to all probability, whether we consider the nature of the problems in question, or the limits of the human mind. In this prodigious system of things in which 'we live and move and have our being,' events of all kinds, great and little, near and remote, are so inextricably inter-

woven with one another, so reciprocally dependent; such is the infinitely variable manner in which phenomena, themselves of the most various kinds, and the subjects of a dozen different sciences, enter into the very same problem, and constitute or modify the very same result; such is the subtle and ever-shifting action of the infinitely diverse phenomena, mechanical, chemical, meteorological, psychological, intellectual, social, and moral, which determine the complex conditions of human history, that neither has man faculties to discern and collect all these subtle, latent, ever-varying data from which to make a perfect induction of the elements of the 'Science of the Future,' nor, if he had, has he the power of analysis and deduction to enable him to calculate the resultant of such a prodigious array of forces, or work out problems into which enter millions of variables. 'In this system,' as one says who had meditated as deeply as any man ever did on the limits of the human faculties, 'any one thing whatever may, for aught we know to the contrary, be a necessary condition to any other;' and hence, as he justly concludes, that system is 'so incomprehensible that a man must really *in the literal sense know nothing at all*, who is not sensible of his ignorance in it.'*

One of the most curious, as well as most incomprehensible, of the features about these vaunting

* 'Analogy,' part i. ch. vii.

speculations as to man's *future* triumphs over the *future*, which are at present so much in fashion with a certain class of persons, is, that he who gave the first stimulus to them in our day—M. Comte—is much more moderate and discreet than many of his youthful disciples; and continually acknowledges, (though of course, despondingly,) his sense of the utter unlikelihood, if not absolute impossibility, of man's advancing beyond conjecture in these regions; of obtaining accurate 'prevision' in relation to any events, the conditions of which involve that immense multiplicity, variableness, and subtlety of phenomena with which medical, meteorological, social, and political science has to deal. Assuredly all present experience confirms this view; and probably this would be allowed by even the most overweening of our speculators. All would admit that to the eyes of the most grey-bearded political sagacity, this world at present is little more than a series of surprises. All would admit that no man with a head on his shoulders will venture to do more than modestly guess what will be the condition of any community a hundred or even fifty years hence. To this, the answer sometimes is, (for so says one of our modern seers,) 'True, but man *will* one day have this prophetic power.' But what is this but to confess that all speculations on the subject, whether true or false, have just as little to do with inductive science

as our dreams,—which may also be true or false? Such speculations may be the stuff out of which poetry may be made, but not science. To talk in this way, is to play the prophet without his inspiration; nay, it is to double his function on the same conditions! For to say that man will be able to prophesy the future, what is it but to *prophesy* that he *will* prophesy? to say that he *will* have 'prevision' of the unknown, what is it but to say that he has now a 'prevision' that he *will* have that 'prevision'? But for the first 'prevision,' as well as for the second, we want arguments and demonstration, not idle guesses or wild promises. Meanwhile, all the present experience of the world, and, as I think, the nature of things, and the limits of the human mind, are equally against the hypothesis. It is a mode of argument, however, which many a philosopher is rather too fond of using. When it is urged, for example, that we have no proof from experience, that the transmutation of species, — the metamorphosis of fishes into birds, or apes into men,—has ever taken place, and that we must transcend all the sphere of experience if we admit it; the answer sometimes is—'But how can we tell what an indefinite time (of which we have no records) may have produced?' Certainly, then, the answer of the science of *experience* should be—'Then of what you know nothing, assert nothing.' And the same may be said of the hypo-

thesis,—for hypothesis it is,—that, given time enough, man, maugre all experience, will be the seer of the future. Science — the science of experience — the science of Bacon, knows nothing of it.

The chief source of the fallacy in which these expectations originate seems to be a hasty supposition that the theory of *averages*, founded on a profounder study of statistics, will produce effects which, in truth, it never can. As said in the preceding essay, we never have *real* science till we have done with averages: 'Science, strictly so called, knows nothing of them; we do not speak of mathematical propositions as being on an average true; nor of gravity as being on an average a uniformly accelerating force. *Averages* always imply as much ignorance as knowledge, and simply show that we have not science; for which, indeed, we substitute them.' Nor do we ever condescend to make any reference to them or use of them, except as our *ignorance* (in the matter of insurances, for example) compels us to make a compromise with them, simply because we have nothing better. Additional probability to our conjectures of the future, the study of averages will certainly give; but conjectures they will still be.

But though it is not easy to conceive that science will ever realise the extravagant hopes of some among its more sanguine disciples, it is certainly possible to *imagine* men endowed with a much higher, more

accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the future than the utmost audacity of an unfledged philosopher probably ever dared to speculate upon. And what then?—I was trying to follow out this thought the other day, just as a play of imagination, and asked myself, What would be the effects on the world, if some favoured individuals had really attained this prescience? Would it turn the world *topsy turvy*? Would such a gift be compatible with the laws which now seem even essential conditions of human society? Would it prove a curse or a blessing? or would it, in truth, leave the world much as it is? If such men existed, would it be easy for them even to make good their pretensions? If they made them good, would mankind welcome them or hate them most? honour them with statues, or lock them up in prisons?

Would the scheme of the future, published by them, be only *conditionally* true—that is, true on the supposition that men would act in a certain manner? and would men consequently be at liberty to act otherwise, in the hope of evading the foreseen evil or anticipating the foreseen good?—to plot and counterplot according to the aspects of this conditional destiny? If so, would not the whole programme be turned into confusion; the prophecies, *ipso facto*, refute themselves? and would not those who uttered them be proclaimed enthusiasts or impostors? And if, notwithstanding, some few things predicted did

take place, would it not be said, as usual, that it was because the prophecy fulfilled itself, by suggesting and stimulating to the actions which fulfilled it?

If, on the other hand, the future were *not* conditional, (if that theory be conceivable,) and yet men still *imagined* they had liberty, is it conceivable that they could be induced to acquiesce in it, and perform the actions which destiny had marked out for them? Would they move in the groove which it had ordained? If not, what again would become of the prophecy? If they did, what would become of themselves? Would they not become in imagination, and therefore in reality, the passive slaves of a foreknown, inevitable fate, with all hope extinguished, all fear intensified, awaiting in terror the foreseen evil, and looking with indifference on the promised good, darkened as it would be by the shadow of intervening calamities and stripped of the bright colouring of hope?

In short, it seemed to me very doubtful whether these *illuminati* would produce much effect on the world, whether their pretensions were credited or not. If they were not, the world would go on much as usual. If they were, then so long as the world is to be governed by any of its present laws, they must be shut up.

While I was pursuing this thought into its various ramifications, my speculation ended, — as many a

speculation of a much better philosopher has ended, —by my falling into a nap. In the dream which followed, I saw distinctly how much better we are able to philosophise when asleep than when awake. The great convenience of this mode is that the *facts*, which your waking moments deny for the testing of your theories, are got in a moment, and without any trouble in the world. No sooner had I fallen asleep, than I found the very state of things I had been speculating about as impossible, had really occurred; and all I had to do was to note the results. Locke says that it is a characteristic of madness, that it reasons rightly from false premises; it is assuredly often a characteristic of that nightly madness which so strangely seizes on us all. I am certain that the logic of my dream was admirable; the only things wanting were the *facts*: but, as a bold philosopher said, 'so much the worse for the facts.'

Methought, then, that I had just returned to my native land after a long absence in a distant part of the world, where news even of railroads and the telegraph sounded almost unreal and magical. On meeting with a scientific friend with whom I had often talked of the possible achievements of science and the limits of the human faculties, I asked for news of what was doing in the scientific world. He assured me, with much solemnity, strangely mingled both with exultation and vexation, that a small con-

fraternity of *savans* had far outdone anything that mere science in our early days had ventured to dream of, and had discovered nothing less than the art of exact 'Prevision of the Future,'—of calculating future contingencies with absolute accuracy. 'And we are trying,' said he, 'to utilise this magnificent discovery, by forming the "Unlimited Knowledge-of-Futurity Company, Limited!" We may well speak *now* of the drama of history; for in truth it will be, like other dramas, composed first and acted afterwards; so that Shakspeare's wonderful assertion, that "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players," will be true in a new and literal sense.'

I told him I was delighted to hear it; but asked whether the discovery was not, like other discoveries, capable of being made generally known, and applied by everybody.

'Everybody!' cried he. 'Is any other science capable of being understood and applied by everybody? Is everybody a Comte? or *even* a Newton—or a Dalton? The great *arcanum* can be mastered only by the very few who have the requisite intellectual capacity. Let me tell you, that you have no conception of the "contention of mind," (as Sir John Herschel calls it, in speaking of the strain of the faculties involved in grappling with the higher problems of astronomy)—you have, I say, no

conception of the effort required in applying this *calculus* of the future. Let Sir John Herschel say what he pleases, astronomical problems are a mere bagatelle to the problems our *illuminati* have to solve. This sort of quasi-omniscience, as I may call it, is a heavy burden, I assure you, for a merely mortal brain.'

'I can easily imagine that,' said I; 'but so much the more will those great men be hailed as the benefactors of their species. Mankind will not only raise statues and monuments in their honour, but, for aught I know, will give them an apotheosis; and perhaps, through the excess of science itself, again lapse into new forms of that very idolatry which science has exploded.

Methought a shade of doubt came over his face.

'It will not be in our time,' he replied. 'You know but little of human nature, if you think their merits will be very soon acknowledged, or their influence soon duly felt.'

'You astonish me,' said I. 'I know that men are apt to be ungrateful to those who have deserved well at their hands; but surely to such signal benefactors——'

'The difficulty,' said he, 'is to make men know that they are such. You see, by what I have just said, that there are but very few indeed of these more than Newtons, very few who are equal to these

sublime achievements of science: and the generality look upon them as quacks: in short, regard them much in the same light as the astrologers and sorcerers of former days. The difficulty is to make people believe that they have the wondrous powers which they claim;—that they are aught better than conjurors or fortune-tellers. Some suspect that they are mad enthusiasts; some that they are even impostors, and that their predictions deserve no more credit than Moses' Pentateuch or Murphy's Almanack. They declare that all past experience is against any such pretensions. I could not have credited, if I had not seen it, the stupendous force of mortal prejudice.'

'But ought not your friends,' said I, 'to have *foreseen* this result of their pretensions? Was not that incident of the future among their "previsions?" and could they not prophesy, that though science could prophesy the future, men would not readily believe it?'

'Perhaps they *ought* to have been prepared for such an event,' said he; 'for our great master, M. Comte, has told us that while a necessary relation subsists between all physical events, the caprices of Will are infinite, and reducible to no law.'

I ought, in fact, to have reasoned (and doubtless should if I had been awake), that this was a surrender of the possibility of any such pretended

powers; for, as the influence of human Will,—and that more and more,—is implicated with and modifies all sorts of physical phenomena, it is impossible to separate them. But we easily get over such trifles in our dreams; and, after all, why should I expect to be more reasonable in my sleeping moments than are many who, it seems, overlook this distinction, though they are awake?

'But then, Mr. Buckle tells you,' said I, 'that the conditions of Mind and Will are just as necessary as physical antecedents and consequents, and you ought on that hypothesis——'

'I don't know how that may be,' said he, peevishly, 'but the fact is as I tell you.'

'Never mind,' said I; 'this prejudice against your *savans* must yield in time; they have only just begun to prophesy; but when folks find that what they say always comes true, they will soon get over their senseless prejudice——'

'It may be so,' he replied; 'but if it is to be tested by events a century hence, our seers will all be in their graves before their pretensions are verified. On the other hand, if they give only prognostics of the morrow, they are told that *that* is but an example of sagacity building upon imminent probabilities; and that these men are doubtless only on a par with other good guessers, or perhaps a little in advance of them.'

'But could you not get them to submit their prophetic history of a century or so to a select body of statesmen? Perhaps that——'

'You know little about the matter,' said he. 'Why, they did so only the other day. They forewarned the Prime Minister that in about a hundred years from this time, England would be in the greatest straits; isolated from every friend and exposed to every enemy; and on the eve of utter destruction by an irresistible combination of hostile powers. And, would you believe it? before they had well finished the prediction, the whole Cabinet unanimously voted that the whole thing was an incredible imposture, and refused to believe a word of it: told them that they —the seers of science, they—the predestined authors of a New Apocalypse, were no whit better than the astrologers of former days!'

'I can readily believe that,' said I, laughing. 'They should have told the story in France.'

'We did,' said he. 'And so much more imbued with scientific light is that great nation, that many of our friends there received the communication with the most implicit docility.'

It seems then, thought I, that though Science may be the oracle, Hope and Fear (so perversely is human nature constituted) are its interpreters; and all certain as the future is, mankind colour it just as they please, in spite of demonstration itself.

'But at all events,' said I, 'there are some classes who would be delighted to avail themselves of these "previsions." How readily would the diplomatists listen to your *savans*! What a convenience for one of those gentlemen to have such a prompter at his ear! What a price would he not be willing to pay for such a Pacolet! What an evident and incontestible superiority it would give him over every rival!'

'You forget,' he answered, 'that his rivals would have other prompters with the same resources, who would keep them equally *au courant* with the arcana of futurity; so that the result would simply be, that the inevitable event would be accepted without any diplomacy at all.'

'That would at all events be a comfort,' said I.

'But to tell you the truth,' said he, 'so far from finding these gentlemen (even if they were convinced of the pretensions of our confraternity) willing to accept such aid, one of them said (truly enough) that diplomacy was like a game at chess or hazard; and that infallibly to know all the results beforehand, would be to rob them of all motive to play; that the chief pleasure of politics, as of every other pursuit, was in the chase; and that I might as well try to persuade a keen sportsman to let his bag be filled at the next game-shop, as to persuade a man to engage at all in pursuits and contests, the end of which was infallibly known beforehand.'

'At all events,' said I, 'what an invaluable "Own Correspondent" one of these *savans* would be to any newspaper! What would not the editor of a journal give for one who could certainly tell, not only the events of the next day, but of the next year, or, for the matter of that, the next twenty years!'

'The same objection precisely,' said he, 'would apply; for each editor would enjoy a similar inspiration: but you also forget that if we had our way, the whole tribe of newspapers would perish. All that our *savans* would have to do, would be to publish, every twenty years or so, the history of the nations, and "Othello's occupation is gone." What, at most, could editors do, but tear out a leaf or so from our infallible "Annual Prophetic Ephemeris," which would of course be as regularly published as the Nautical Almanack? There would be an end of those ingenious daily speculations which keep editors and readers in pleasing suspense; as well as of those busy rumours which profitably fill the columns of to-day, and, by the necessity of contradicting them, as profitably fill the columns of to-morrow. No, my good sir, there are no such enemies of the "seers of the future" as the editors of the newspapers—unless it be their readers, who, I firmly believe, love the charming suspense of a "Quidnunc" above all the certainty in the world.'

In a similar manner, (to say nothing more of the

original doubt which haunted the community with regard to these vast pretensions of science,) I found other large classes, much better pleased with the thought of unconsciously *making* history by their daily course of action, than with that of foretelling it; and who determined to hold on by the old jog-trot of probabilities. They were by no means so entranced with the prospect of having a clear 'prevision' of the future, as I had at first imagined. The preternaturally gifted men, in short, seemed in danger of being *de trop* in the universe, by reason of their transcendent superiority to all the rest of mankind, and of being reduced by science to all the helplessness of ignorance. It was a singular case of *l'embarras des richesses.*

'But,' said I at length, 'if their knowledge of futurity be indeed *scientific*, and not mere probable conjecture on the general course of things, it must embrace the knowledge of *private* events as well as public. I know there are some who say that man may get a scientific knowledge of the future history of communities, but not of individuals; of events in the mass, but not of events in detail. That they may guess at both with probability, I concede; but to have accurate *scientific* knowledge of the future in the mass, surely demands the scientific knowledge of the minutest details; for, as all things, the great and the little, are bound up together—as the greatest events

often lead to the least, and the least, by a variety of intermediate links, to the greatest, a real prevision of the one is surely impossible without that of the other!'

'Of course,' he replied, with some appearance of contempt. 'If I know with *absolute certainty* the resultant of a number of component forces, I must know the components themselves; if I am *certainly* to know exactly when and where such and such events —the conjoint product of multitudinous phenomena —are to take place, it can only be by knowing those phenomena perfectly in all their possible relations and interaction; if I am to know *certainly* that a man will die at a given moment, partly from physical disease and partly from mental causes, partly by the effect of climate and partly by his own folly and neglect, partly by one doctor's ignorance and perhaps partly by another doctor's science,—how can I possibly tell the event except by a knowledge of all these conspiring causes? Communities are but collections of units; the *total* effect of their action is the total effect of all the circumstances operating upon each individual: nay, many of these units are often of sufficient importance, sometimes almost singly, sometimes in conjunction with two or three others, to determine the destiny of a nation for a century or more; and unless the history of these were known how could we know the result? Who could certainly have foretold the

history of France for the last eighty years, if he had left out the history of the two Napoleons?'

Though I admitted the reasonableness of all this, the coolness with which this pretension, in spite of my being in a dream, was asserted, somewhat staggered me. 'My friend,' said I, 'what you say may be or may not be true; but to those who have sometimes urged me with the possibilities of "scientific prevision" of future events, in spite of their involution with an infinitude of inter-dependent phenomena, I have sometimes proposed a little experiment, which, it seems to me, (perhaps too hastily,) may test the power of man to deal with problems, when the phenomena get beyond a certain degree of variety, subtlety, or rapidity of movement. Put a bushel of sand in a fine sieve; mark any grain you will, so as to know it again; then sift it all to the last grain by an equable motion; but before you do so, predict the interstice of the sieve through which that grain will pass; and if you are right, I, for one, can no longer doubt any pretension you may please to make: though I confess that the feat is nothing to the infallible prediction of when and where events are to happen, which are dependent — not like this, on homogeneous conditions, mere mechanical laws, — but in virtue of conditions far more subtle, various, and complex, and involving phenomena which belong to some dozen sciences instead of one.'

Methought he led me into another room, filled with an array of strange uncouth-looking instruments, and where sat a *savant*, the very impersonation of abstraction and distraction;

> Erudite, profound,
> Terribly arch'd and aquiline his nose;

his brow knit till his eyes were almost hidden, and his forehead ridged and corrugated with intense thought. To him my friend mentioned my little request. It seemed to me that the wonderful man accepted this challenge as coolly as if it had been an invitation to dinner. Methought he slowly rose, proceeded leisurely to fulfil all my conditions, and to my surprise, (though not perhaps to that of some of my readers, if they have sufficient faith in dreams or in science,) actually, after a short calculation, resolved the problem. And yet, leisurely as he was, it seemed that in a very few minutes—such virtue is in dreams!—he showed me the particle of sand passing through its predicted and predestined hole!

'This now,' said my friend condescendingly, 'you perhaps think difficult.' I nodded, as I well might. 'It is nothing,' said he, 'a mere nothing, to the intricacies of calculation which we are sometimes obliged to encounter. You are quite right in supposing that the actual phenomena involved in the production of any remote event, or indeed almost any event, are

incomparably more numerous and convoluted than in this case. It was only the other day that I found, that in fifteen years, the trifling circumstance of a horse casting his shoe, and thereby delaying a traveller for a few minutes, will, by a series of interconnected events, widening and widening in their influence, like the circles made by throwing a stone into still water, change the condition of a large portion of the world.'

'That,' said I, 'is not in the least degree wonderful; and it reminds me of something I have somewhere read, of a great man whose brilliant career was absolutely determined by some such infinitesimal casualty,' (doubtless it was this very reminiscence which suggested the case in my dream;) '*that* does not at all puzzle me. What does puzzle me is, that you should have been able to hunt out and predict the *connection* through all these intricacies.'

'It is,' said he, 'by an altogether transcendental Calculus of Variations!'

I had now no remaining doubts of the reality of the discovery. How could I? I therefore told my friend that though his fraternity seemed in danger of being a little *de trop* in the world, on the principle that 'too much water drowned the miller,' yet that since they could divine the future of *individuals*, as well as communities, it would be easy for them to attain a great reputation, as well as more solid gain, by fortune-telling;—that millions would no doubt come to them

to know with certainty,—not their luck, but their destiny.

I must do my *savant* the justice to say that he made a very wry face at such a suggestion; and seemed to feel keenly for the dignity of his sublime science, and the humiliation to which human prejudice subjected it. He shrugged his shoulders and said :—

"You are perhaps a little mistaken; our success even in that direction is not so clear as you imagine. Not less than the sorcerers of old, are we exposed to the jealousy and suspicion of the civil magistrate. The fact is that the same wise politicians who won't listen to our predictions of coming calamities to the community, loudly proclaim that we are the most formidable enemies it has; and constructing a little dilemma of their own, argue thus:—That we shall tell people's fortunes, (thus do they profanely burlesque our sublime art,) either *falsely* or *truly*; if the former, that we must be punished, as Bacon says those who spread false prophecies ought to be; if the latter, that the men to whom we promise future *good*, will be betrayed into indolence and apathy; lose the charm of life and the chief stimulus to activity; or strive to anticipate the promised good in unlawful modes: that, on the other hand, those to whom we prophecy future *evil*, will sink into dreadful despondency, or essay in a thousand ways to elude or even counteract the decrees of fate; that all sorts of people will flock to our oracles

to know, not their own lot, but that of their neighbours; that plots and counterplots of one against another will be endless and remediless; and that the whole world will be filled with mutual suspicion, and society poisoned in every vein. They tell us, that it will be much the same as if that great safeguard of the world's peace, and even existence,—the inviolable secresy of each man's thoughts,—were destroyed, and every man carried a window in his breast. They tell us that though they cannot prevent fools from seeking to know their own fortunes, any attempt to reveal the secret of one man's future to his neighbour, will be an offence calling for a severe and summary punishment.

'It is in vain that we tell them "that events are neither to be eluded nor frustrated by being foreknown; that the things decreed by fate *must* come to pass:" for they have another dilemma. They ingeniously argue: "If so, then what is the *good*, or rather, what must not be the *mischief*, of foreknowing them? The foreseen good will be regarded with less vivid desire, and the foreseen evil with greater dread; or rather, the promised good will be poisoned by the sure anticipation of the foreseen evil: so that, at the very best, we shall inflict on men what Leibnitz calls an intolerable evil; for he says, that though men would be willing to accept an indefinite lease of life, provided the incidents were perpetually varied, no mortal would

willingly tread the very same beaten track again;—which, in effect, every man must do, who *certainly* knows his future beforehand."

'Besides which, they have the impudence to say, that unless all men be absolute fatalists, they will not acquiesce in the decrees of fate; and they here ask a question with which, I confess, in spite of all our science, our *savans* are themselves posed—namely, "Whether the events predicted are *absolutely necessary*, or only *conditionally necessary*?" They say that if the people believe the former, then all the aforesaid evils must ensue; if the latter, they would spend life in a perpetual, even though it be a futile, struggle with destiny itself.

'I frankly confess I cannot decide this question as to whether things are absolutely or only conditionally necessary; for, as we told them, it was one of those questions which our great Masters had pronounced "metaphysical rubbish," and impossible of solution; and that therefore it was a mere loss of time and thought to argue about it. "But," they retorted, "you *must* decide it somehow; for if things are only conditionally necessary,—if in order to such and such an event's happening to any individual, that individual is to act so and so,—then, since no community will take a course which you say will be ruinous, and no individual will go on board a ship which you tell him will be wrecked, or enter a train in which he will be

smashed, your predicted train of events will be liable to be continually broken, your concatenation of 'antecedents and consequents' continually disconcerted,—by the mere fact of your *making it known*! It seems to be essential to your predicted chain of events, that you should *not* make it known; so that *ignorance* of the future, not *science* of it, is the necessary condition of your predictions being fulfilled. By all means, therefore, if you wish for the credit of your vaticinations, conceal them till after the event. Prophecies after fulfilment always come true."* Thus do they not only disregard, but taunt us. Though this wisdom cries aloud in the street, like another wisdom, it cries in vain. Men will not heed it.'

'But surely,' said I, 'if the old soothsayers had their thousands eager to consult them, you will have your tens of thousands. What will not people give to get at the *truth*, which those spurious seers only pretended to tell?'

'Very few,' said he, 'have come as yet; and I begin to doubt whether there are many who *wish* to know it. Those who have come, seem to have little better notion of us than of common conjurors, and treat our prognostications much as theirs are treated. Few will believe aught of the future but what is pleasant, and cannot be got to believe what is otherwise. For them there is no oracle except what presages good. Every promise of *that*, they believe

devoutly, and forget the rest. But they might do that (as all the rest of mankind do) without us; for,' he added, echoing my thought, 'Hope is the interpreter, though Science is the oracle.'

'But do none wish at least to know the hour of their death—that they may duly prepare for it?'

'That least of all,' said he. 'Not a soul will hear his tale told to the end; they won't let us unveil to them the hour or the mode of their dissolution: beyond it, even if they wished, we cannot go; for the chain of causes and effects, so far as we can discern, is there broken off. But they won't go so far; they prefer having a veil thrown over the closing scene of their life. Like other play-goers, they do not like death to be actually exhibited on the stage, and willingly let the curtain fall ere the catastrophe.'

I began to fear lest the lot of our new Magi should resemble that of the ancient alchemists, who, although boasting of their power of making mountains of gold and silver, were always in rags and poverty, for want of credit enough to raise that little loan of money which was the trifling preliminary to the realisation of their golden visions.

'But *you* at least,' said I at last, 'have not exhibited the childish prejudice of these people, and preferred ignorance to knowledge? You, like a true sage in quest of truth, have doubtless read the mazes of your own life, and have seen yourself dead and buried long

ago; *you* have dared to look even to the last point of prophetic vision?'

'For what purpose?' said he. 'Is not that knowledge the very misery of prisoners in the condemned cell? are they not accounted miserable precisely because they know they are to die just that day month? Will not hundreds, who pity them for that very circumstance, in fact die *before* them? and yet are not these accounted happy in comparison, because they know it not? Shall I confess it? Even *I* too have so much of a mortal man about me, that I have not been able to overcome the weakness. I have attempted it, but my hand has so shaken as I made the calculation that I have not been able to complete it.'

'Well,' said I, 'that is not wonderful; for if Newton's hand so shook, when he was completing the calculation by which he was to verify his theory of universal gravitation, that he was obliged to ask his pupil to take the pen and perform the operations for him, no wonder a man's hand trembles when he is "working the sum" of his own life, and every digit is bringing out the dread result clearer and clearer. But why not do as Newton did, and send for one of your brother *savans* to perform the friendly office for you? Could you not do this little kindness for one another?'

'I know not how it is,' he replied, 'but all of us think it may as well be let alone.'

'At all events,' said I, 'you must be happy, as a

mighty seer, in the consciousness of possessing this wonderful attribute.'

'If to be omniscient and to be powerless, if to have vast gifts lodged with us as useless, can make us so, we are,' said he, with a sigh.

I began to suspect that vaulting ambition had overleaped itself; that the knowledge of a God will not comport with the condition of a man; and that, while we remain what we are in other respects, we may know too much for our own happiness as well as too little. But I had no time to pursue my reflections further, for that tremendous wizard who had managed the little calculation about the grain of sand,—and which he thought so little of, though the problem in the 'Arenarius' of Archimedes was a trifle to it,—here broke in by saying: 'As you inquired so curiously as to whether we had not read our own horoscope, no doubt you would like to know your own. I will tell you,' he added,—looking, I thought, first arch, then malicious, then downright wicked. Methought he snatched up at the same time a pencil, and a sort of photographer's box, from behind which he began peeping and mowing at me. In vain I protested I did not wish to know any such secrets. 'Sit still,' he cried, 'I shall have you in a minute,—you shall know exactly when you are to die,—I see it won't be very long—the very instant——' 'I *won't* know,' I cried, in a paroxysm of terror, which awoke me. I

commended all astrologers, sorcerers, and conjurors, scientific and otherwise, to the very bottom of the Limbo of Vanity;—whither indeed they sped immediately; for 'I awoke and behold it was a dream.'

Yet not 'all a dream;' for I felt more convinced than ever, that certain knowledge of the future was not only impossible to man, but that unless man himself, the world of which he forms a part, and the laws which govern both, were altogether different, it was a gift not to be coveted; that like 'pride,' it was not 'made for man;' that if men in *general* possessed it, it could only make them supremely miserable by despoiling them of all their joys, and multiplying all their sorrows; that if they had it, they must seek to rid themselves of it by imploring a cup of Lethe before they could act as nature and necessity now prompt them: that if a *few* possessed it, the rest of mankind would either disbelieve them, or if they believed them, must gag them in self-defence; and that in either case, the world would go on much as at present. I felt that it is a prerogative which, as God expressly challenges it as his *peculium*,—one of the royal jewels in the diadem of the 'Infinite Majesty,'—so we may be assured He will never part with it to us. And as, unless we were Gods too, we cannot safely possess it, so it is essential to our moral discipline that we be without it. By our ignorance of the future, God governs and educates us; 'abases

the proud and exalts the lowly,' teaches us dependence and humility, stimulates our activity, encourages hope when things look dark, awakens salutary fear when they look dangerously bright; in a word, from the depths of that unknown abyss into which we so vainly peer, evokes the chief instruments and appliances of our moral probation.

It also made me feel more strongly—what I had often felt before—that to utter *true* prophecy must require, for a world like this, infinite wisdom no less than knowledge; and that we need not wonder at any of the obscurities which precede its fulfilment, if it but be made plain when it is fulfilled. For He alone who perfectly knows the conditions under which such intimations can be given, without disturbing that course of events in which foreknown and predetermined issues are to be wrought out by voluntary agents and moral means, can paint the future in that *chiaroscuro* which shall allow man neither to anticipate nor frustrate any part of it; which shall leave him the ignorant instrument of working out the designs of a higher will, while he yet follows his own; so to act, that the supreme Ruler has His end, and we have ours.

'A paradox—a paradox!' I fancy I hear many say. It may be so; but I believe it to be a great truth notwithstanding.

REASONS FOR *SCEPTICISM* AS TO CERTAIN SPECULATIONS OF MODERN SCIENCE:

ADDRESSED TO A *BELIEVER.*

LETTER I.

REASONS FOR SCEPTICISM

AS TO CERTAIN SPECULATIONS OF MODERN SCIENCE: ADDRESSED TO A BELIEVER.

LETTER I.

To M. D.—What you call my 'scepticism' (of course we are all sceptics as to what we do *not* believe) in relation to some of your new-fangled speculations, you ascribe to a 'blind adherence' to the traditional beliefs of a 'stereotyped theology;' and you tell me that it is in oblivion or contempt of what Bacon says in the First Book of his 'Novum Organum.'

You were never more mistaken in your life. I demur to your scientific crotchets, not because I believe the Bible (though I do believe it), but because I believe in Bacon. Even if I had not read a syllable of the Bible, and had no 'traditional beliefs' to renounce, I should have objected to the new scientific dogmas which you urge on my acceptance, just as much as I do now; and that precisely because (as I think) you, not I, have forgotten Bacon, and been misled by those 'idola' of the human

intellect, before which not theologians alone, but scientific speculators too, (as indeed his First Book is more expressly designed to show,) may too readily fall.

The hint, however, to look into Bacon has not been lost upon me, though I fancy I did not particularly need it; for if I ever made a book my *vademecum*, it is the First Book of the Novum Organum.

And surely if ever a book deserved a periodic or frequent perusal, it is this. Gibbon, it is said, read every year, the Provincial Letters; Voltaire always had the Carême of Massilon on his table; Robert Hall, the Essays of Addison; one friend of mine used annually to peruse the principal writings of Burke; and another, Don Quixote. I should be afraid to do precisely the same by Bacon, lest he himself should rebuke me for exhibiting somewhat of that same slavish spirit which he condemns in the admirers of Aristotle. But I confess that I read the First Book of his Novum Organum with a perpetual renewal both of wonder and delight; not only for the profound and comprehensive spirit in which he explores the recesses of human error, but for the perpetual coruscations with which the most exquisite imagination that ever ministered to philosophy, lights up all his dark way, and gleams on the fossil remains and glittering petrifactions of ancient Prejudice, like a thousand wax-lights on the sides of a spar cavern.

It is precisely *because* I take him as my guide, that I reject the dogmas for which you challenge my belief; nor am I unwilling to give you my reasons for so saying.

While he condemns, and justly condemns (Aphorism lxv.), those who, not content with affirming that there must be a harmony between the 'Word' and the 'Works' of God (though it may be long before we can fully show it), persist in deducing whole 'systems of natural philosophy from the first chapter of Genesis or the book of Job,' he is gloriously impartial in his censures. He shows not only that the theologian, but the scientific man also, is ever liable to fall into delusions similar to those he exposes in this book. As men were so in ages past, so he believes they would be in the ages to come; and that, in spite even of his own clear exposition of the sources of their errors.

He did not suppose that, having once so luminously sketched those 'idola,'—some of them congenital to the human mind, others necessarily superinduced in the course of its development,—which obstruct our admission of truth, or betray us into the reception of error, he could thereby secure the mind (scientific or otherwise) against the danger of being deluded by them. On the contrary, while he proves that the past history of science, throughout its whole course, has illustrated their potency, and while he ascribes its long failure or

slow and uncertain progress to their dominion, he distinctly declares that even the inauguration of his own better method would itself bring with it a new temptation to fall into the old errors; that those 'idola' he had guarded against, would be apt to reappear, and sometimes even in more subtle forms; —that the tendency to hasty generalisation, the impatience to arrive at results, the inability of the mind to 'stay its judgment' or exercise a wise abstinence, the temptation to yield to the seductions of a forward and obtrusive fancy, to round an imperfect theory, or give symmetry to a halting hypothesis, would still be apt as ever to haunt the human intellect, however men might acknowledge the principles of the Inductive Philosophy. And therefore he expressly declares (Aphorism lxiv.)—'There is a certain caution not to be pretermitted; for I foresee and augur, that if ever men, aroused by my counsels, betake themselves seriously to experiment and bid farewell to sophistical doctrines, then indeed, through the premature and precipitate hurry of the understanding, the leaping or flying to universals or principles of things, great dangers may be apprehended from philosophies of this' (the empirical) 'kind, against which evil we ought, even now, to be on our guard.' Nor is it superfluous to insist that men still need to be warned against a source of delusion which, he says, had been so common in previous ages of

philosophy:—namely, a tendency to frame 'those foolish models of self-created worlds (as it were little *apes* of the true, *simiolas*) which the fancies of men have sketched in their philosophical systems,' and which, he says, 'must be given to the winds. Let men know how vast a difference there is (as I have already said) between the Idols of the *human* mind, and the Ideas of the *Divine*.' (Aphorism cxxiv.)

If we may judge from the extent and audacity of modern hypothesis-making in relation to this very class of speculations, or the confidence with which mere hypotheses are too often spoken of, as if they were demonstrated truths, this aphorism may be profitably studied in the present day; for the 'Hypotheses non fingo,' which Newton considered his glory, seems little to the taste of many recent philosophers.

Certainly, my friend, I for one believe that never since Bacon's time has there been greater license of hypothesis than in our own day; and especially in relation to a class of subjects demanding, (if they are ever destined to be effectually and definitely settled by man at all, and are not rather among those things which it is the 'glory of God to conceal,' or which He leaves to our modest conjecture only,) the utmost exercise of philosophic caution and self-restraint. Of many of them indeed one may well doubt, with M. Comte, whether they are, or *can* be, the legitimate province of science at all. To investigate the *present*

laws of nature, to trace the succession of antecedents and consequents of all *present* phenomena, to analyse and classify the *facts* of the world as it is actually constituted, and lies open to our *experience*, would seem to be the proper province of *experimental science*. But, not content with this, many of you have set up as 'world-makers,'—and are as busy as the old Greek philosophers about Cosmogonies; about the origin and evolution of all things; about the possible period of the gestation of the universe from its first embryo condition; the primary elements out of which all things have been evolved; whether there need have been any such thing as 'creation'-proper, or any 'beginning' at all; whether the 'primordial forms' of all animated nature need have been more than three or four, or even more than one; and whether all species of creatures may not have been developed out of, or transmuted into, one another.

Now as the absolute decision of such questions—(some of them seem, in fact, rather the proper *pabulum* of those metaphysical speculations, which modern science generally despises, than of legitimate scientific investigation) — necessarily carries us beyond the sphere of experience into regions transcendental to it, I cannot help feeling some sympathy with M. Comte's too trenchant and summary proscription of all such subjects, as not even belonging to genuine science; as subjects in which man, merely as *man*,

with his merely natural *organa* of science, cannot hope to know, and, at best, can but conjecture.

It is accordingly not a little droll to see how M. Comte, indisposed though he was to admit any other Supreme Being than 'Collective Humanity,' yet censures the *dogmatical* Atheist, who seeks to give a plausible account of 'the causes and origin of things' as more unreasonable than the Theists themselves: 'The true spirit of the Positive Philosophy consists in always substituting the study of laws, for the study of causes. It is, consequently, irreconcileable with the ambitious dreams of a misty Atheism, relative to the *formation of the universe, the origin of animals, and so forth.* Positivism does not hesitate to declare such doctrinal chimeras to be very inferior, even in rationality, to the spontaneous beliefs of mankind.'* He on like grounds excludes geology (as ordinarily understood) from the circle of the sciences altogether!

I should certainly be sorry to go so far; or say that men must remain perpetually or absolutely ignorant on all the problems in question; indeed there are not a few of us who are old-fashioned enough to believe that we may get glimpses of the truth about some of them, even though the oracles of science were dumb. Nor would I deny that science may lawfully, if it will but modestly, form at least its hypotheses respecting them, even though forced to acknowledge that to ob-

* See also 'Catechism of Pos. Rel.,' pp. 172, 178. Eng. Tr.

tain absolute certitude is beyond its power. But most assuredly the subjects are such as are inveterately haunted by some of the worst 'idola,' and perhaps have their chief charm for men whose ardent imagination particularly exposes them to their seductive power.

While none ask science to refrain from such speculations, if it will but refrain from dogmatism; if it will not take conjecture for certainty; if it will acknowledge that a thing is still but a guess, when it is really so, one cannot but wish, in the interests of science itself, that it should deal not only very modestly, but very sparingly with them. If not, they will absorb more and more of the time and toil which should be given to more hopeful and legitimate fields of scientific enterprise: the tendency will constantly be, as in the case of the alchemists, to substitute visionary projects for practical objects; to devote too much attention to things which pique curiosity indeed, but also least repay merely human labour upon them.

The simple fact is, that this class of questions, being bound up with the most intense longings of the human heart for knowledge, are, in the absence of either a presumed *higher* light of revelation, or the all but impossible apathy which Comte enjoins on his 'dogmatic Atheist,' so piquant, so enticing and fascinating, that man, left to himself, will run out into endless speculations as to the origin and the evolution of things; as to whence he came and whither he is

going. If he cannot rest content with the Genesis and Apocalypse of the Bible, he will make a Genesis and Apocalypse for himself. Hence the extent to which all such speculations grafted themselves upon the physics of the ancient world; nor was it perhaps (as I have ventured elsewhere to suggest) the least of the *temporal* benefits of Christianity,—'that so many myriads found repose in it from the ceaseless questions which must often have agitated the greatest sages of antiquity; that so large a portion of the highest intellect of our race, in fact, accepted its decisions on those questions, and was thus set free to pursue the path of science within the limits and in the directions in which alone human science can be successfully prosecuted.'*

Nor have I any hesitation in predicting that if the present era of science should be unhappily signalised by (what some think its boast) a general tendency to religious scepticism, ~~that~~ there will be just as voluminous speculation on these subjects as ever; that there will be a 'plentiful crop of sects and schisms,' from which the world has for ages been happily free; that they will draw more and more, for the support of their own fungous growth, on the thought, time and toil, which should serve for the nourishment of genuine science; that men will be disputing whether their forefathers were once apes, instead of considering questions vitally interesting to them as *men*; or how

* Article 'Plato,' 'Edinburgh Review,' April, 1848.

the world came into being, rather than how it may be 'subdued' and improved. The human mind cannot endure to be without a theory on these subjects, whether it be inclined to scepticism or the contrary; and hence the difficulty of the lesson which M. Comte so calmly recommends to the dogmatic Atheist. Hence, too, in numberless writings of the present day, we see a scepticism asserting itself with all the passion and vehemence which it is fond of representing as the peculiar infirmity of theologians!

However, only let science abstain from dogmatically asserting that *that* is demonstrated truth, which is but crude conjecture, and there will be nothing to complain of.

But I cannot say that this is the case with you, or with some of those whose disciple you avow yourself. The theories you urge upon my attention, and which (as I think) illustrate Bacon's 'idola' far better than his 'inductive method,' are affirmed by you and by others with a dogmatism which seems to me diametrically opposed to all true science. I read, for example, in one of the critiques you have commended, (I quote the very words)—'The best chapter in the book, as might have been expected, is that which treats of "Design in Nature." The poor old final causes will always afford to an assailant as easy a victory as that of Falstaff over Hotspur. . . Yet since there certainly *was* a time when the argument

was considered of value, a forcible *exposition of its emptiness* does not seem to us altogether superfluous.'

In another place I read, 'Language was not innate, but adventitious—a mere acquirement, having its origin in the superiority of the human understanding. . . . Each *separate* tribe formed its own language, and there could *be no doubt* that in each case the framers were *arrant savages*, which was proved by the fact, that the rudest tribes ever discovered had already completed the task of forming a perfect language.'

Listen again to the oracles of modern wisdom :—'There arise no new *species*, by any creative interference; none disappear by a divine mandate of destruction, since the natural course of things, the process of development of all organisms and of the earth is amply sufficient for the production of all these phenomena. Even man is neither a distinct creature, formed in a special manner, and differently from all other animals, nor provided with a special soul, and endowed with a divine breath of life; he is only the highest product of a progressive natural selection, and descends from the simious group standing next to man.'

Again—'By science and *by reason*, we neither have, nor can possibly have, any evidence of a Deity working miracles.'

But are these things worthy of the caution of the inductive philosophy? Amidst all this confident and dogmatical assertion, you know, as well as I do, that

the points here so curtly assumed are not only, every one of them, denied or disputed by the great mass of intelligent men, but everywhere doubted, though in some quarters keenly controverted, in the scientific world itself.

I now proceed to show why, on Bacon's grounds, not on those of 'traditional beliefs,' I cannot accept as proven, any of the six 'articles' of your scientific creed, which you so confidently urge upon my faith: my 'faith,' I may well say; for assuredly, they are not commended to my reason.

I shall only premise one thing; and that is, that the gibes and sarcasms which, after the fashion of the day, you launch against the advocates of 'traditional beliefs' and 'stereotyped dogmas,' will equally apply to you, and many like you. There is not a foible of the intellect, not an 'idolum tribûs,' 'specûs,' or 'theatri,' with which the first are charged, that may not be retorted on some of the more advanced of the modern champions of science: and precisely because there is, in all of us, so much more of *man* than of either science or theology. Thus, you tell the theologian that he believes what he *wishes* to be true,—in spite of evidence. What else can be said of the advocates of many wild theories which scientific fancy has given us in our day,—having all the illusion, and none of the beauty, of poetry? You tell me that the theologian believes a dogma because it is old; and do not our modern

speculators often believe their shining novelties, for a similar though an opposite reason, *i.e.* just because they are new? You tell me that many cling to certain opinions, because they wish the Bible to be true; and is it not too evident from the tone of many, that they think an opinion chiefly charming because they wish the Bible to be false? You tell us that of course this or that work, in defence of an 'effete orthodoxy,' is received with praise by all the orthodox journals, and that we can tell beforehand the organs that will applaud. And cannot we do the same in reference to any novel bit of heterodoxy? Can we not lay our finger beforehand on the very journals that will pet and patronise that, even though it be directly in the teeth of some *other* heterodoxy, which they have also petted and patronised? You tell me that you are shocked at the 'odium theologicum' which so universally prevails among theologians, and is indeed the constant theme of reproach in journals and newspapers;—just as if, by the way, the 'odium politicum' was quite unknown to the world! But is there not also such a thing as even the 'odium scientificum'? Cannot our *savans* on occasion snarl and growl over an old jawbone or an old tooth, out of a gravel drift, as fiercely as theologians over any of their doctrines? Have not the amenities of science been sometimes so forgotten as to call for the rebukes of our great, and in general most just, censor of manners,—our *Custos morum*,—'Mr. Punch'?

May not a *savant* be so provoking and so provoked as even to 'spit on the gaberdine' of a heterodox doubter of some tale of the sacred '*gorilla*'?—I do not mention these things as against science, any more than the 'odium theologicum' should be so uncandidly and perpetually urged against theology. The 'odium theologicum,' and the 'odium politicum,' and the 'odium scientificum' are all alike odious; but they are the fruit, not of theology, or politics, or science, but just of human nature—of passion and prejudice; —an *idolum* of the heart, if not of the intellect, and just as misleading as any *idolum* of the intellect can be. When darling opinions, and systems, and hypotheses, and claims to discovery, are to be defended, the coolest and most tranquil fields of speculation — even those of mathematics—are apt to be troubled with these hurricanes of passion, as the quarrels between the followers of Leibnitz and Newton full well prove.

Nay, as if to show that there is no infirmity of the intellect, no form of self-deception, to which you men of science pronounce theologians peculiarly subject, which is at all peculiar to them, or which is not equally exemplified by other classes of men, even that formidable charge of being the easy dupes and victims of 'spiritual pretensions' and 'pious frauds' may be retorted upon a good many of you. To the various pretensions and juggleries of modern 'spiritualism,' science has yielded its full quota of credulity; and if irreligious,

not religious, men, have sometimes made religion the dupe of 'pious frauds,' quick-eyed science has often been victimised of late in the very same manner; and simply for this reason, that theologians and philosophers happen to be alike—men. I refer, for example, to the plentiful manufacture and eager reception of the *modern-antique* relics of a Pre-Adamite world.

Perhaps it may be asked here, 'But do you intend to charge eminent scientific men with having been voluntarily either accomplices or victims of these "pious frauds" in behalf of scientific truth?' Assuredly not; no more than I suppose Clemens Romanus himself to have forged the 'Apostolical Constitutions,' or that some great and good man, for his sins unluckily canonised as a saint, really bequeathed to the church all the rubbish, in the shape of relics, which passes under his name. But in science, philosophy, and theology alike, men will exhibit the same strong hankering for evidence, where they *wish* an opinion to be true, and the same credulity in receiving it; and in all cases there will be opportunely found those who will take advantage of this disposition, and provide any evidence that may be wanted. Let there be credulity enough, and money enough, and a man can get anything he wants, whether it be the toe or the tooth of a Pre-Adamite man, or the toe or the tooth of a St. Francis or a St. Dominic. Let him bid high enough, and bring faith enough, and if he pleases, he

can get a genuine spoon of Tubal-cain's own manufacture, inscribed with some hieroglyphics vouching to be the old metal-worker's own trade-mark, and purporting to mean, 'Tubal-cain, maker,—Mesopotamia!'

I shall now proceed to notice the six doctrines to which you challenge my assent, on the grounds of science; but, as I affirm, in contravention of all true science. It will be observed that I need neither to impugn nor defend the conclusions themselves. I am concerned only to show that the faith often reposed in them, and which you invite me to exercise, is in defiance of genuine science, at war alike with the method of Bacon and the practice of Newton.

I. And the first I will mention is what you call 'Uniformitarianism' in geology,—for the idolatry of which, (in the language of a very able Edinburgh Reviewer,) it is really not very easy to account by anything but a certain 'turn of thought' in the speculator; or in the language of Bacon, by an '*idolum specûs*,' a misleading image in the philosopher's own mind.

According to this, we are to assume, it seems, (for in the very nature of the case it can be nothing more than assumption), that not only have precisely the same forces been always in operation in the production of terrestrial phenomena, but that in no past time have they operated with greater intensity than at present; that is, that the *rate* or law of change has never been other than it is now, or imperceptibly slow; that as we

now see the sea gaining upon this shore and receding upon that, at the rate of a few score yards in a century, similarly slow have such changes ever been; that the vast mountain chains have been elevated to their present height by a movement absolutely insensible; and in one word, to use the favourite term of the advocates of this view—that there have been 'no catastrophes' in the history of our world. The ground of such an hypothesis is of course that in the *present* condition of the world there is an *approximation* (for that is all) to such a supposed freedom from 'catastrophes;' that is, during the comparatively brief experience of man; that is, again, we are to measure the depths of pre-historic time by our present experience; or, in the phraseology of Protagoras, 'make man the measure of all things' in this matter.

Now the first thing to be asked is: What is meant by a 'catastrophe'? If it be meant that whatever is inconsistent with a precise law of absolute 'continuity' in all geological phenomena, (indeed some expressly argue for such a law,) operating with the same uniformly slow *rate* of change, is to be considered a catastrophe,—then we have no such condition, even *now*, as the hypothesis in question requires. We have 'catastrophes' even now, quite sufficient in magnitude to suggest the analogy that in some periods of the world's 'pre-historic' history there may have been greater 'catastrophes,' rather than that there were

none. Certainly the tremendous earthquakes which have often shaken down great cities, or the volcanic eruptions which have swallowed them up,—the inundations which have occasionally swept over whole provinces,—all these seem 'catastrophes' sufficiently 'catastrophic' to those who suffer from them, however little they may disturb the equanimity of the philosopher who quietly speculates about them 5000 miles off, or 2000 years after date. The earthquake of Lisbon, which destroyed at once 60,000 human beings; the late cyclone at Calcutta, which killed as many, flooded 800 square miles of country, and resistlessly broke the barriers along 80 miles of coast, may surely claim to be called 'catastrophes,' if there be any meaning in the word at all. And even if, *singly*, none were greater in pre-historic times, yet if they only happened more frequently, (though happily without such 'catastrophic' effects to human beings,) the law of geological 'continuity' would seem to be sufficiently violated.

What is meant, then, by no 'catastrophes'? Is it meant that none were *greater* than the *greatest* that have occurred during the historic period? What an arbitrary limitation is here! Not to repeat what has just been insisted upon, that even if there were no greater catastrophes, (but only more frequent,) all idea of a law of 'continuity' would be torn to tatters;—who shall assure us that if there were any as great as

the greatest that have occurred in historic time, there may not have been still greater before it? Certainly, those which have visited the world suggest the idea that the tremendous forces which we thus know to exist in the bosom of Nature may, for aught we can tell, have acted in remote ages with much more intensity and over much larger surfaces than at present. If it be said that the convulsions of this nature which we *now* witness are infinitesimal, compared with what would be required to elevate or submerge whole continents, the answer is, that these convulsions, though less extensive, are equally in the teeth of the *principle* assumed; equally a violation of an absolutely continuous and equable variation: not to say that, if we thus make the idea of a 'catastrophe' purely relative to the sum of the unchanged, then the entire annihilation of our world would be but an infinitesimal event in relation to the entire system, or that of half-a-score of worlds still but infinitesimal in relation to the visible universe. They would be relatively no more 'catastrophal' than the rolling of a pebble from Mont Blanc, to the mountain from which it was detached!

Moreover, it may well be suggested that if the changes of this nature that now take place are less frequent and destructive than those which may have visited our earth at earlier periods, it is precisely what we should expect, if God be indeed a beneficent Creator, and the system in which man was to play a

part was to be preserved at all; that is, if there be really any propriety in the language used by the most illustrious geologists, as well as by the rest of the world, and which supposes that the earth was *prepared* for the habitation of man. When man came to inhabit his house, if he was not to receive a 'writ of ejectment' as soon as he got into it, it was essential that there should not be the tumultous movements and astounding shocks which might occasionally shake it during the building. But not to insist on this; the changes which occur now are assuredly quite startling enough, and wrought by a sufficiently terrible power, to show us what may have been.

To pass by these conjectures;—it may be added that, judging from all the *appearances* of the earth, it certainly seems more natural to suspect that those same forces which now occasionally act with a tremendous energy and intensity over a limited space, sometimes acted in like manner over far larger portions of our globe. The gigantic ravines, the cloven mountains, the earth in rents and fissures, the plicatures, contortions, and fractures of strata, displaced at every angle, all seem to point to occasional changes of prodigious magnitude rapidly effected, and by the operation of the most energetic forces. And even if it be admitted, that all such changes *might* be wrought by given forces operating with inconceivable slowness throughout an unlimited time, still, as they might be also produced by

a force of given magnitude operating through a shorter time, either formula, apart from other proofs, will be of equal mechanical value; not to say that there are phenomena, which, even in the estimation of the most eminent geologists, cannot be accounted for by the theory. Even a principal advocate for the uniformitarian view admits, 'that many great rivers could never, even in millions of years, have excavated the valleys through which they flow.' *

But, above all, were it possible thus to account for the phenomena, still the question recurs, What can we *know* about the matter? How can we pretend to go back to those primeval ages, and penetrate those mysteries of the twilight of time? The rebuke of God to the patriarch might well be addressed to many a geologist who dogmatises on this subject—'Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?'

Speaking of *apparent* violations of the law of geologic continuity, one of its most strenuous champions says that its advocates may with 'just as much probability and confidence assert' that the revolutions in question have been produced by infinitesimally slow changes brought about along a period 'enormous and incalculable, as the catastrophist can maintain it to have been brief and spasmodic.' † Precisely so,—a severe judge of evidence would reply. Apart from

* Cited in 'Edinburgh Review,' July, 1863, p. 299.

† Baden Powell, 'Order of Nature,' p. 345.

other and more decisive evidence, neither the one nor the other of you has any business to dogmatise on the matter, since both have got into regions which transcend the sphere of experience.

And if any scope at all is to be allowed to such *à priori* reasoning, one would feel inclined to argue with a very able writer in the 'Edinburgh,' already referred to, that considering the infinite variety of nature, the theory of a varying intensity of the great physical forces 'seems intrinsically far more probable than a monotony of physical operation, the evidence of which seems to exist principally in the *turn of thought* of those who advocate it.'

Of course, I do not pretend that it is possible to establish anything certain by merely human light, on either side; though I think to most candid minds the appearances of the world rather favour a different hypothesis from yours. While our very limited experience must be regarded as an altogether fallacious measure, it certainly seems not unreasonable, from the aspects of nature, to surmise that both sudden revolutions and slow variations, intervals of intense action alternating with intervals of repose, have been employed, and probably contemporaneously in different portions of the globe, in developing it into its present form. But, whether it be so or not, the question is, what just logical right can we have to lay down this 'uniformitarianism' as a postulate, and to judge of all

things in the immense series of pre-historic ages, by such an arbitrarily imagined law, deduced from the computed *rate* of present terrestrial change ;—though, by the way, geologists differ by hundreds of thousands, and even millions of years, as to the time in which certain given changes have been wrought.

The notion is of course very welcome to any one who is predetermined that the world shall be of unlimited antiquity ; for it makes even the commencement of the present human epoch recede into the dimmest distance. But to judge of past time by such a chronometer is, as a witty critic* says, 'much the same as if a man, finding that an individual nearly six feet in height had grown only half an inch last year, were to conclude that he must be 140 years old.' In short, the principle is nothing but the fanciful extension of our limited experience to immense periods of which we know nothing. This principle is opposed by many eminent geologists with the vigour worthy of those who aspire to act upon Newton's great maxim :—'Hypotheses non fingo.' 'Do not geologists,' as one, himself a celebrated geologist, says, 'sometimes speak with needless freedom'—most people would say, most presumptuous freedom—'of the ages that have gone? Such expressions as that "Time costs Nature no-

* Or rather as *three* witty critics have said,—for the same illustration seems to have occurred to, at all events has been used by, them all.

thing," appear to me no better than the phrase which ascribes to Nature "the horror of a *vacuum*." ' (I would just add, that if Time costs Nature nothing, it seems to cost these speculators just as little.) 'Are we to regard as information of value the assertion that *millions on millions* of ages have passed since the Epoch of Life in some of the earlier strata? Is not this abuse of arithmetic likely to lead to a low estimate of the evidence in support of such random conclusions, and of the uncritical judgment which so readily accepts them?'*

II. Another favourite speculation of yours, as well as of some other modern votaries of science, I must think most strangely *un*scientific. I mean that, in virtue of which (such is your antipathy to the idea of 'creation') you insist that all the forms of existence, organic and inorganic, have proceeded from one another in the course of an 'orderly cosmical evolution,' which leaves us without any necessity of speculating upon the fact of *origination*; that, in fact, 'we have no reason to think that the universe ever had a beginning, any more than that it will ever have an end.'

Now if you accepted the old atheistic hypothesis of the eternal existence of the world as it is,—of an eternal succession of men and mice, for example, and

* Phillips' Address to the Geological Society, cited in 'Edinburgh Review,' 1863.

left the problem undetermined whether the first of the series of owls was an egg or an owl,—though I should not think your theory very scientific, I should at least cease to argue with you about it; but as you do not, and choose to chase all the fleeting forms of animated being through all the diversities and modifications of genera and species to a few 'primordial forms,' perhaps to one, I confess I think your repugnance to the idea of 'creation' has not relieved you from the necessity of admitting it; and, as I will proceed to show, that you have left the great difficulty, from which the 'turn of thought' of certain philosophers recoils, just where it was!

In one point we are both agreed. The absolute origination of anything is a notion incomprehensible by us, — transcendental to all the faculties of our nature. I, who admit, and you, who deny the Bible, are at one there. As for me, I admit that the conception of Creation,—the absolute *origination* of all things, or of anything, is a conception derived from the Bible alone. I believe it as a *fact*, however incomprehensible; but the appeal is to my faith: 'By *faith* we know that the worlds were made by the word of God, and that things which are seen were not made of things that do appear.'—Everybody then being agreed that all merely human speculation on the subject is perfectly futile, one would think that the next thing to be said by *science* would be, 'As this is a

subject transcendental to us, let us scientific folks leave it alone.' But no; you are not satisfied with such a simple, and *truly* scientific course, but proceed to lay down hypotheses by which the evolution of the whole visible creation is to be explained, not only without any *successive* acts of creation, but in such way as to inspire a doubt whether there has been any such act at all!

These theories still relegate me, at last, to phenomena which leave me precisely in the original difficulty,—a difficulty which you merely strive to hide from me, and from your own eyes, by removing the epoch of the origination of all things sufficiently far back, and tracing the succession of changes through a sufficiently long pedigree. 'All living things,' say some philosophers,—and you among them, —'the infinite diversities of animal forms, the exhaustless variety of species that people this world, were originated, not by creation, but out of one another, by a process of very slow development: men (say) from apes, apes from birds, birds from fishes, fishes from earlier and more rudimentary forms of life; and these, in all probability, from three or four minute germs of vitality.'

It is hard, of course, to say how *next* to nothing these were; but unhappily for the theorist they were still existent 'somethings,' and had life; and so we have the problem concerning '*origination*' brought

back on our hands; for if 'Ex nihilo nihil fit' be absolutely true, it is a difficulty that does not admit of degrees; the creation of an atom is as great a puzzle as the creation of a world. In vain—scandalised at the idea of creation—in vain you tell me that your three or four 'primordial forms' perhaps date from millions of millions of years ago, more or less! A million of years, when you have the command of all time, is doubtless of little consequence; and indeed some of your geologic Pantheists who think that man is to become a God, seem to have already anticipated one of the divine attributes; for 'a thousand years with them are as one day, and one day as a thousand years.' But use your freedom; or rather, abuse your license; go as far back as you please; and what then?

I do not ask who gave you, on such a subject, this prodigious license of speculation; or how you came to have the right to talk thus freely of the transactions of millions of years ago; or how you can *know* anything of those successive changes by which you suppose the whole universe to have been thus evolved from a few primordial forms? I might ask all this, and possibly much more, before exercising a transcendental faith in transcendental speculations on questions which both of us admit to be transcendental. But a far more weighty objection is this:—Do you flatter yourself that you have got rid of that

ungrateful idea of 'absolute creation,' and that it is no longer necessary to encumber yourself with it? What do you make out of those three or four primordial forms, or even that *one* 'primordial form,' to which some of you think these may possibly be reduced? Were these eternal? Had they eternal vitality within them, though it was eternally latent? —latent, though at last destined to make up for lost time, or rather a lost eternity, by evolving out of an invisible egg or two all the visible universe? Or were they created out of nothing? In leaving us in doubt upon this point, you leave the whole difficulty just where you found it.

It is in vain for the theorist to tell us that he has, at all events, limited the successive acts of creation, and given the Deity a *minimum* to do; that the appearance of different species at different periods is all admirably provided for by that theory by which he has so satisfactorily evolved men out of the ape, and the ape and all his ancestors out of other and still inferior beings. The answer of course will be,—'But the difficulty is to evade the idea of "creation" itself. It is as easy for us to believe that that power, whatever it was, has repeated the act of creation, as that he has performed it once; that he has repeated it at different, widely different stages of the history of the universe, as that he performed it at all. Nay, it is to most of us much easier than it

would be to suppose the whole animated universe developed out of a seed, perhaps not half the size of a grain of millet.'

Now to this question, involving the logical exigency of admitting 'origination' at some time or other, I do not see that you give any other answer than an evasive one, which in fact amounts to this,—'But if the act of creation took place at all, it took place so long ago and such a great way off, that we had better say nothing about it.' Say nothing, then, and give up those 'primordial forms,' which betray you while you think they conceal you.

'But it would be distressing to me,' you may say, 'to imagine that if there *be* a God, he has not proceeded in the way of gradual evolution according to a law which I can trace, and in analogy, at all events, with all those laws which I can see in operation about me, and in conformity with my infinitesimal experience.' Yes—that is it: it is the 'turn of thought' again; it is an *idolum tribûs* that is troubling you; you must make yourself and your experience the measure of all things; and in obedience to this, you will speak of ten thousand things of which you know nothing, and talk glibly of the events of millions of years ago as of those of yesterday.

III. Subservient to the preceding speculation, and, like it, transcending the sphere of experience, is that

doctrine of the transmutation of species, in which the old and, as it was at one time thought, exploded theory of Lamarck is substantially revived.—I will be perfectly frank. I freely acknowledge to you that it is not the more than Ovidian *strangeness* of these metamorphoses that would at all stagger me, if you but gave me evidence for them as plainly as you give me conjecture and fancy. They are to me as *miracles* (which, I shall presently endeavour to show, in spite of your protest, they precisely resemble, and all I want is the proper *evidence* for them.

When I see the transformations which take place in that system of wonders in which we live; when I see what becomes of a grain of 'mustard seed' thrown into the earth; when I see the grub transfigured into a winged butterfly; when I see the varieties of the same species which actually exist, (though the variation is still within moderate limits,) I hardly see why, in the abstract, anything may not become anything. But when I ask for the *facts* which are to sustain the prodigious theory that all the genera and species of living things have proceeded from two or three 'primordial' germs, perhaps even from one, then I feel I may indeed accept your theory as poetry, but I must renounce it as science.

For surely you have the strangest way of reasoning. When I ask for specimens of the tentative and transitional forms that must have existed, in numbers

numberless, on such an hypothesis as yours, in the rocky cemeteries which contain the fossil relics of other extinct animals, you tell me that the geological eras are so vast that they have perished, and that it is unreasonable to ask for them. When I ask for proofs in historic time that such changes are going on now, you tell me that the whole of historic time is too short to give even an appreciable portion of so slow a transformation! So that, as the geologic eras are so vast that all the required proofs have perished, the historic period is too short to allow any of them to appear! How is it possible to refute, — but then, moreover, how is it possible to establish,—an hypothesis which is so conveniently provided with fanciful alternatives? If I complain of the absence of *experimental* proof, proof which seems to my weakness a necessary condition of *experimental* science, you refer me to Baden Powell, who says that, 'Supposing it true that we have *no* experience of a particular event occurring, and supposing at the same time it could be shown that *if* that event *did actually occur*, we could never, (from the particular nature of the case), have any *evidence* of its occurrence, then it is clear that the argument from *want* of experience must fall to the ground.' Certainly; but so must the argument for the actual occurrence of the event. Surely it is much as if a man, being asked for the proof of something that depended on documentary

evidence, were to reply that it was unreasonable to expect or ask it; for that the document was burnt, and therefore, in the particular case, the proof *could* not be given!

In short, I object to the speculation, not, as you say, because I believe it to be inconsistent with my 'traditional beliefs,' but because it seems to me an outrage on the principles of inductive science itself; —telling me to speculate in regions acknowledged to be transcendental to experience; telling me that the condition of doing so is to leave all experience behind me, and that I am not to wonder that I do not find its evidence there!

In truth, it seems to me, when I compare your reasoning on this subject with that on other subjects, —that of 'Uniformitarianism,' for example, — that you palpably play fast and loose with experience. In order to prove *that*, you will have experience paramount;—the present forces of nature, and none other, operating within precisely the present limits: when you want to prove 'transmutation' of species, then the *want* of experience is of no consequence! Similarly, when you want to prove that no testimony can prove miracles, because these, you say, are opposed to experience, then experience is everything; when you want to prove your 'transmutations' of species, of the same nature, and equally wonderful with miracles, (nay, more so, if many

miracles be more wonderful than a few), then experience so limited as ours is not worth mentioning! This clearly will not do. You appeal, as an inductive philosopher, to experience; and to experience you must go. As matters stand, you are at once tied to it, and untied, as pleases you. It is a sleight of hand, something like that of the 'Davenport Brothers.' By science, you are bound fast in the cords of *experience*; but no sooner are you in your Cabinet, than presto! the lights are put out—fiddles and trumpets played by supernatural agency come tumbling about us—mystic sounds of a dialect unknown to science murmur in our ears and distract our attention—and you are found liberated from your bonds. And thus we are to believe the whole story of transmutations, and that 'anything may become anything,' all experience notwithstanding.

But assuredly Christians ought not to be twitted with excess of faith, when the votaries of Science can indulge in such *abandon* of fancy.

In another letter I shall briefly consider those remaining articles of your philosophic creed particularly urged on my consideration—namely, the alleged unlimited antiquity of *man*,—I mean the *genus Homo*, such as you and I belong to;—the incredibility of miracles;—and man's predicted absolute mastery of all the secrets of nature.

LETTER II.

I said, in my last communication, I should endeavour to show that you are hasty in concluding from the recent discoveries the immense antiquity of man; that is, I added, of the '*genus Homo* to which you and I belong.' I made use of that expression because I by no means deny that there *may* have been, (for aught you and I know,) and it may be hereafter proved that there *was*, a species of animal amidst the numberless varieties that have appeared and vanished, still more like man than any of the existing ape tribes; more like him in general organisation, and with keener instincts and more intelligence than any known apes now possess; and yet not *man*,—having none of man's higher intellectual nor a vestige of his distinctive moral endowments. Such a discovery, if it were made, certainly need not very much surprise us; nor is there a word in Scripture (which is silent on all such Pre-Adamite matters) against it.

In demanding my assent to the doctrine of the unlimited antiquity of our race, you require me, on a very hasty summons, to abandon a conclusion which *seemed* to be established by a great convergence of evidence; and amongst other evidence, by the general opinion, shared by many of the greatest zoologists and geolo-

gists, both of the last and the present generation, that man is of comparatively recent appearance on our globe. You call upon me to do this principally on the strength of the renowned flint instruments, bearing a resemblance (though often rude enough) to spear-heads, arrow-heads, knives or axes. These have been found in certain localities in which it is presumed the strata have been undisturbed for periods long anterior to all trace of authentic history. In one or two cases also, a few relics of those who have been *presumed* to be the accomplished artificers of these not very artificial instruments have been supposed to be discovered. But as some of these relics seem to prove the ingenuity of the moderns in providing the scientific world with such evidence, far more conclusively than the flint instruments prove the skill of the Pre-Adamites in making them; and as in other cases they merely indicate juxtaposition, and not contemporaneousness, of the flints and the human relics, this momentous point must be left as one still *sub judice.*

But the flint instruments alone, you suppose to be conclusive; they are as old, you say, as the drifts in which they are found; and in these drifts are also found, it seems, the remains of some species of animals now and long since extinct. There is no proof, you argue, that the drift has been disturbed within historic times; therefore, man is of unlimited antiquity, perhaps lived hundreds of thousands of years ago!

I am far from saying that the scientific men who have expounded this argument have pledged themselves for its absolute validity, or that they would affirm that it is more than probable; though I think they may be justly charged with favouring it on too slender grounds, certainly with considering too exclusively the arguments on one side only; and that they would have done better to wait for further light.

But in this, as in other cases, multitudes, (especially of the young,) who would fain find the doctrine true and feel the influence of that rather prevalent *idolum tribûs* by which 'the wish is father to the thought,' have accepted it without hesitation, as if it were already demonstrated, and raised their pæan over the prostrate and utterly futile Mosaic history and chronology. Not a few of these assume all the airs of infallible knowledge, express mingled pity and contempt for those purblind and prejudiced souls who still profess to doubt, and attribute it to the usual bigotry of theology, and a determination *not* to see! Yet let us calmly consider, *without at all pronouncing on the ultimate issues of the controversy*, how many alternatives the advocate of such a theory is bound to set aside, and how many objections he may fairly be called upon to meet and remove, before he can logically call on any sober man to acquiesce in his conclusions.

Of course I lay no stress on what has been sometimes said, that it is a matter of doubt whether fancy

may not have played false with the admirers of the rude flint-instruments, and in many instances given to man what is due to the freaks of nature; or, in a far greater number of instances, given to *Pre-Adamite* men what is too surely due to the astute modern *manufacturer* of these same antiquities. Cases of the former kind *may* have occurred: an immense number of the latter we know have occurred. Flint instruments of *truly* fabulous antiquity have followed the too modern law of 'demand and supply:' so extensively indeed as to have covered the whole subject in the minds of many with undeserved suspicion.

But I concede at once that many of these flint implements are genuine, and the work, if not of human, yet of *some* intelligence: though here I cannot but pause for a moment just to express admiration at the sudden quickness evinced by some of you, (though ardent disciples of M. Comte,) in seizing 'proofs of design!' You laugh at the idea of 'design' when the term is applied to the works of God! You can see nothing *there*—nothing in the exquisite harmonies and homologies with which heaven and earth are filled; nothing in the exquisite construction of plants and animals, or in an eye or a hand; nothing in any of these, or in the relations which bind all the infinitely diversified objects which surround us into a permanent system; you can see nothing, I say, in all these that indicates *Design.* No: they are mere

'adaptations' of one thing to another, though no Mind 'adapted' them! But no sooner do you see one of these clumsy flint implements, though the by-standers are ready to swear that, if a work of art at all, it would disgrace anybody but a Troglodyte to have turned out such an implement, than you at once pronounce that it is not only clearly a work of art, but distinctly and exclusively of *human* art!—However, I grant for argument's sake, that many of these flint implements are genuine, and ancient, and works of art, whether that art be human or not. Still, as an advocate for the theory of the immense antiquity of man, deduced from thence, you have fairly to get rid of the following alternatives and objections:—

1. The localities being comparatively rare in which these relics are found under *such* conditions as fairly suggest your argument, you are bound to prove that the drifts which contain them have never, owing to local causes, been disturbed; that the flints and the animal remains are not only *now* in juxtaposition, but were contemporaneously deposited there; and that both have been just as they are, even from those remote periods to which you refer them: a conclusion in which some eminent geologists are by no means as yet prepared to acquiesce.

2. On the supposition that this is got over, and that these relics are really to be referred to *some* intelligence that existed in those remote ages in which also

existed those now extinct animals, whose remains are found with them, you are bound to prove that *that* intelligence was *human*. To myself, as I have frankly said, it would not be at all surprising to find that among the other strange animals, (now extinct,) which the vast geological periods reveal; among those varied forms of life, which, on *any* theory, pass by such gradual and scarcely perceptible differences into one another, there had existed a species of animal still nearer the human type than any of the existing species of the ape; and which, without man's reason or conscience, might have had intelligence enough (it does not seem to require much) to form these uncouth flint weapons, for the purpose of more easily taking their prey, or defending themselves from those huge and formidable animals by which, in the Pre-Adamite world, they may be supposed to have been surrounded. Indeed, it is somewhat hard to imagine that creatures who could only do the feats of skill, which these implements reveal, and who left in *them* the sole memorials of their art, could be (without far other proof) allied to the race who, during the brief historic period, have filled the earth with the monuments of their versatile ingenuity. While I (though of course asserting nothing) have no difficulty in a supposition of the kind just mentioned — acknowledging, as I must, by how fine a gradation the various classes of animated beings pass into one

another—sure I am, that you, as an advocate of the theory of 'the transmutation of species,' ought not only to admit the plausibility of such a solution, but to welcome it as a valuable auxiliary; since it would afford a fragment of evidence of a kind very much in request by you. You contend that in 'the struggle for life,' which has led to the existing species, innumerable varieties have perished; and though you acknowledge that you do not find their fossil remains, you also confess, that you *ought* by rights to do so. It is a trivial difficulty, which I think would stagger a less docile faith than yours. But now, on the supposition of some creature more than ape, but less than man, there would be a case of 'variety' made to your hands! If you will have a simious progenitor, here would be one who could make flint implements at least. Meantime, that there might have been such a creature is equally possible on your theory or on any other.

3. But again; you are bound to produce not only some sparse and equivocal traces of a Pre-Adamite humanity, but the fossil remains of those who are supposed to have manufactured and made use of these implements; just as you *can* produce the remains of the animals, (of species now extinct,) with which they are presumed to have been contemporaneous. It was the very want of this evidence which made the illustrious Cuvier speak so confidently of

the comparatively recent appearance of man upon the earth; and until the argument can be shown to be fallacious by discovering the fossil *human* remains, and that as plentifully (at all events as generally diffused) as of the other animals, that argument can hardly be thought refuted. As Cuvier justly observed, there is no reason why men's remains should have all perished while the remains of other animals have been preserved. It is very suspicious, surely, that there should be such multitudinous flint implements (such a profusion in so small a space, as the gravels of Acheul and Hoxne), and nobody to use them. The whole race seems to have manufactured little else, and then vanished, body and soul together! In the present lack of proof you content yourself, I see, with the strong consolation that these human remains will be found. And if you are as confident that they will be found as some of you are that the stone-hatchets and arrow-heads you have bought are all genuine, and are willing to give as good a price for them, I have no doubt they *will* be found after some fashion or other. But whether, as regards undoubted genuineness or quantity, they will satisfy the keen eyes of scientific criticism, is yet to be seen.

4. Meantime if these fossil remains were 'as plentiful as blackberries,' another alternative is yet to be set aside. Many geologists, and those too of large knowledge, experience, and just reputation for both,

affirm that it is not so clear that the extinct animals with whose remains these relics of man's supposed skill have so long slumbered, (conceding for a moment that the juxtaposition is not accidental,) have been extinct so long as has been hastily imagined. They think that mammoths and other extinct mammalia may have survived for many ages later than is commonly supposed, and may have existed far into historic times. With regard to the mammoth in particular, they appeal to an instance of one discovered in the last century in Siberia, so well preserved in ice that its very flesh and hair were in perfect preservation; the dogs fed upon it; and if those who found it had happened to be fond of mammoth flesh, they would in all probability have eaten it too, perhaps only finding it (as some geologist says) 'rather high.' At all events, it is hard to suppose that it belonged to some extremely remote epoch in the pre-historic period.

This view is taken by many geologists of eminence. Instead of carrying man indefinitely far back, these geologists would bring the mammoth and other animals proportionably forward. And if this be the true view, the phenomena may be equally accounted for without ascribing to man an unlimited antiquity.

5. And in addition to showing that none of these alternatives can be taken, you are bound to give some plausible answer to the *objections* which have been hitherto thought (pretty reasonably) opposed to the

idea of man's indefinite antiquity. Among them, is the immense duration of that low condition of barbarism in which all these poor monuments of his skill reveal him. Tell us how it is that man—such as we know his nature to be—who, in those few thousands of years during which he has had a history, has filled the earth with the trophies of his power and intelligence, should have existed for scores of thousands, perhaps for hundreds of thousands of years, and yet done nothing but make these wretched Troglodyte instruments! How is it he did not strike a little more light out of his flint, with which he seems to have been so everlastingly busy? For those of us indeed who cherish the views of God which are disclosed to us in Genesis—who believe that He originally created man for a happier destiny than that of living, perhaps for a thousand centuries of years, in the condition of the lowest savage—it would be very hard by any means to reconcile ourselves to the conclusion to which your hypothesis drives us; namely, that not only did man enter the world as a very inferior sort of beast—not having been provided for as well as other beasts, having neither wings, feathers, talons, nor a natural suit of clothes to his back—but that he actually passed through a hundred thousand years' curriculum or so, and then only graduated into a savage who could chip flints! But,—not to look at it as a *moral* question,—I certainly think it requires to be explained

how man, having within him the capacities which he now has, came to be no more, and to do no more, and to leave no more behind him, than these abortions of Pre-Adamite art evince. If it be objected that barbarous nations *now* pass many generations without any great progress in art, the answer is, *first*, that in the present case the whole race is supposed to have done so; and, *secondly*, not for a few generations, but for an immense duration; whereas in that short period which we call historic, and during the whole of that period, so far as we have any records, we find populous nations in possession of all the arts of prime importance. How is it that many nations should have done a thousand times more in five thousand years, than the whole of the race before in the unlimited past of their duration? Nor would it be easy to match, even in the monuments of our rudest tribes, such specimens as comprise the whole civilisation of this exquisite race of Pre-Adamites!

And yet to complete the paradox, it is supposed—as one of our *savans* expressly affirms—that each of these immemorially barbarous tribes had performed the most difficult task of all,—that of *inventing* a language for itself! If so, one would think it might have invented anything.

But if man did exist for unnumbered centuries without emerging from the pleasant aboriginal condition in which this hypothesis places him, and then in

five thousand years has filled the world with the proofs of his power and sagacity; has invented, and lost, and invented again many of the arts, blossomed into high civilisation in many different nations, (on this theory spontaneously), scanned and measured the heavens, and run round the whole circle of science, I think you must acknowledge that, whether there have been 'convulsions' in the physical world or not, the revolutions in the intellectual condition of mankind have certainly exhibited the most startling cataclysms, and the most determined breaches of the 'law of continuity.'

It has been well said by an able critic, 'What must we think of the *human* animal who, in nine times ten thousand years, left no better monuments of his ingenuity? This immensity of time, with nothing to show for it, is a heavy incumbrance on the hypothesis.'*

Nor is it unworthy of remark, that whereas during the whole historic period we find great nations of the earth in possession of those arts of civilisation which bespeak an advanced race, we then come suddenly, as it were, on a dead wall, and can follow no further. We plunge at once from light into utter darkness. Though, on your theory, man had existed for so long a period, even its faintest traditions had perished!

Never was an immense duration, of which you are

* 'Quarterly Review,' vol. cxiv., p. 117.

so lavish, of so little worth. An unlimited time is demanded in which to do nothing. It is the old fig-seller at Constantinople come again,—'In the name of the Prophet, figs!'

6. I think you are bound, before you so confidently affirm the immense antiquity of man, to answer the objections which used to be directed against the old-fashioned Atheists, who maintained that man had not only been for an *unlimited* time on the earth, but from all eternity! It was answered, that if so, then, according to the law of increase of population, the world ought long since to have been over-peopled. It seems to me that, on similar grounds, one may reasonably doubt whether man has been an inhabitant of the earth for anything like the duration you would assign, or even beyond the 6,000 or 7,000 years to which the Mosaic chronology (however liberally interpreted) restricts us. Of course it is impossible to obtain more than a rude approximation to the rate at which, on an average, the whole race may have increased; but that there has been a perpetual advance, we have much reason to infer, from the intensity with which the law of increase acts, from the known facts of history, and from the recent statistical results of investigation as to the rate of increase exhibited by many most variously-conditioned nations. Imperfect though these be, we see that we are brought face to face with a law as stable and constant in its operation

(though its activity may not be uniform) as any of those which geologists are busy in investigating. The abstract intensity of the law of increase is such, that if it operated unchecked, it would double population in the course of every twenty-five years; and though, of course, nothing like this rate, except for short periods, and limited and very exceptionally favoured nations, is maintained (otherwise the earth would have been over-peopled long ago), yet the rapidity with which expansion takes place the moment any temporary checks are removed, the ease with which the sudden wastes of war, pestilence, and emigration are repaired; the steady increase which many nations (our own, for example) have made, though at varying rates, for nearly a thousand years together, and that in spite of checks of the most formidable kind, prove the intense pressure of the law in question.

It is impossible, as I have admitted, to give anything more than an approximate solution of the question,—How long a time, on an average, does it require to double the race? But this, I think, may be said,—that let the period be much longer than that to which any rational induction from all the *facts we know* would restrict us, it will be still such as to give a very moderate duration for man on earth, compared with your calculation of 'thousands of centuries at least.' It may however be conjectured, on not unplausible grounds, and from some rather large calcu-

lations as to particular nations, traced through their whole history, that this doubling in general may have taken place somewhere between 180 and 230 years. This last-named rate is, on an *average*, about that of our own country, dating from the Norman Conquest, if we may depend at all on the calculated population at that period. According to Sharon Turner, and other learned investigators, the population of our own island at the date in question was probably about 1,700,000. Now our country has not been less subject to disturbing causes and all the ordinary checks than most others; it has had plenty of wars, both domestic and foreign; it has had pestilence, the 'black death,' famine, extensive emigrations. All these have been in operation not less than in the generality of other countries, ancient or modern.

In the latter and more civilised periods, of course, the increase has been more rapid: the population rather more than doubled between 1700 and 1811: but also doubled between 1740 and 1821, and is now perhaps doubling at a still more rapid rate. France, since 1700, has, in spite of all her wars and revolutions, been increasing in about the ratio of $\frac{1}{200}$ annually: being 20,000,000 in 1700, and 35,000,000 in 1850. Russia (in which, if the checks have been very great, her conquests have probably compensated them), is computed to be doubling at the present period at the rate of about 115 years. Of course the *recent* rate of

increase, in all these cases would, for obvious reasons, be greater than in the less civilised periods and nations; but assuming, for a moment, that the average rate of doubling would be anywhere between 180 and 230 years, it is clear that we should soon get to an end of the problem; in fact, beginning with such a term as Noah's family, consisting 'of eight souls,' they would, if doubled every 180 years, amount in 5000 years to nearly the present population of the globe, or about 1,000,000,000.

Of course the more rapid the period of doubling, the stronger is my argument.

But it may be admitted that in relation to most of these nations, (for the last century at all events), in spite of wars, pestilence and famine, the conditions have been more favourable to fecundity than in more remote ages.*

Of course I do not mean to affirm that the doubling of the race has gone on at the actual rate of 180 or 230 years continuously, or even at any such *precise rate on an average.* If I did I should subject myself to the rebuke which (as I observed in my last letter) some geologists have incurred for inferring that because a deposit

* I perceive by a note in Dr. Pusey's recent able work on Daniel, that an argument somewhat similar to the above has been put forth by Moigno in 'Les Mondes.' This paper I have not seen, nor had Dr. Pusey; but it is to be hoped that some of our journals will give us an account of it. The rate of annual increase is assumed in that paper to be $\frac{1}{227}$.

has increased so many inches in 100 years, so it may have increased at the same rate for 100,000 ; namely, that it is much as if they had inferred that, because a man six feet high has grown half an inch in the last year, therefore he must be 144 years old ! My argument depends on no such chronometric accuracy. I merely affirm that if there be any period of doubling fixed upon, at all approximating to any rational interpretation of *the facts we know* ; if any limit be assigned that is in the smallest degree probable from those *facts* ; then there is no reason to believe that man has existed on the earth during the enormous periods demanded by your recent geological speculations. If the law of increase has been in perpetual operation in any measure approaching the above ratios, then, take what limit you will that is at all rationally presumable from the data, and you will see that man cannot have been on the earth for anything like the 1,000 centuries which you modestly assume as your minimum. Take, if you will, not 250 years for the time of doubling, but 300, or even 500, and the duration of man on the earth will still have been but moderate.

Nor is it any answer to say, that in many mountainous and barren regions, the population will be sparse, and may be nearly stationary for ages. For the tendency of the mighty law above-mentioned, impels man to occupy by preference the regions which oppose no such restrictions ; and the stationary popu-

lation of such districts being sparse, can, for that very reason, but little affect the general problem. The great masses of the earth's population, in virtue of the great law of increase, will be found elsewhere. Nor is it any satisfactory argument to say that barbarous and poverty-stricken nations may have been for many ages stationary; it is by no means always so; the population of some poor countries, if they be but ordinarily fertile, (as Ireland, for example,) will often be more dense than that of far more favoured countries.

And although Hume and Gibbon have long since shown that many of the statements of the populousness of the nations of antiquity are greatly exaggerated, yet certainly the tribes that overran the Roman Empire, and subdued all Europe, must have maintained at least the ordinary average of human fecundity.

We shall doubtless know more of all this by means of statistics by and by: meantime you are, I think, bound to wait the course of these investigations, and to remember that you are in face of a law certainly as imperious and apparently as stable as any other. As a recent writer in the *Quarterly Review* well observes: 'If indeed we were to admit and confide in any such computation,' (speaking of certain geological conjectures,) 'how could we refuse to credit the deduction from *another* law, which has at least a more plausible

foundation, the law of augmenting population? For by an easy computation it is possible to show that from a single pair, the population of the globe, increasing by only $\frac{1}{200}$, or even $\frac{1}{300}$ every year, which has been taken as a fair average, would reach its actual amount of more than 1000 millions in less than 6000 years.'*

V. I cannot but smile at the high-handed way in which (in common with many a writer of our day) you endeavour to settle the question of—Miracles. You lay it down, as an *axiom*, a thing not to be disputed, but simply to be taken for granted, that the *supernatural* never did occur in the history of the universe, and never will; and you consequently make it a fundamental position of historical criticism, that any relation of that kind in any documents whatever, no matter what the strength of testimony which sustains it,—is at once to be rejected as *per se* incredible! Strauss and Renan both avow this as the foundation-stone of their criticism of the Gospels; and by this, and the kindred principle,—that all prophecy is, for similar reasons, incredible,—make short and easy work of the claims of Christianity to be considered a divine revelation. One (so called) philosopher in France has even gone the length of saying, that as it is plain a miracle is utterly incredible, he will not condescend even to argue the point with any one who contends for the opposite hypothesis: that he regards

* 'Quarterly Review,' 1863, p. 383.

any such person as one not to be reasoned with! I fancy most of his opponents would feel justified in accepting the insult as a compliment, and think themselves well rid of the necessity of debating any point whatever with a disputant who begins by saying that he will take for granted the whole matter in debate; and that, too, a matter in which the bulk of mankind in all past ages, and the majority of them at this very moment (including so many of the most illustrious names in philosophy and science, as well as in theology), are arrayed against him.

But why this violent prepossession against all miracles, so that it shall pass as nothing less than a fundamental principle of all historic criticism, not only that a miracle is not to be seen now, (on which philosophers and theologians are pretty well agreed,) but that there has never been, or will be, such a thing? It cannot be said that we see it from the essential relations of 'cause and effect,' or from the connection of antecedents and consequents, that such a thing is impossible; for it is an axiom of modern philosophy, and not least among those who contend against the credibility of a miracle, that we know nothing at all of the *nexus* between antecedent and consequent in any two events; nay, many of you contend that the whole controversy about 'cause and effect' is 'unprofitable rubbish.'

It cannot be because we see by the light of an

innate or intuitive principle of belief, that a miracle is impossible; for though one gentleman, not much famed for metaphysical acumen, appears almost to hint at some such thing, it would be an '*intuition*' unluckily contradicted by the immediate consciousness of the great majority of mankind, who have notoriously had no difficulty in believing miracles, and indeed have believed them only too greedily!

It cannot be because we see, by direct consciousness, that all control, by the exercise of *will*, of any of the ordinary laws of nature is impossible *per se*; for, as has been well said by Dr. Mansel in one of the essays entitled 'Aids to Faith,' we can, to a certain extent, do this very feat ourselves; it is done in effect when any voluntary act of *mind* controls, modifies, arrests, contradicts the ordinary course of the laws of *matter*. The phenomenon, of course, is not a miracle; but it is at least sufficiently analogous, both in the mode and in the result, to make any assertion of the incredibility of a miracle, on *such* a ground, utterly unreasonable. As regards the *mode*, the influence by which mind acts upon matter, is perfectly inscrutable; as inscrutable as any miracle can possibly be: and the *fact* is equally indisputable,—that the ordinary course of the laws of the material world is altered, suspended, contradicted, modified, violated by such acts: as when we arrest, by an act of will, a stone which would otherwise fall, or take the life which would otherwise be prolonged;

—a sort of violation of the laws of nature, to which unhappily man in all ages has been only too prone. If it be said that these arrests of the material laws, though contradictory to those laws, are yet also according to law, it may be replied, 'No otherwise than the miracles by which God may suspend or violate *His* laws will also be according to law;' that is, that if He work miracles, there will be good reason for so doing; and that His intervention, like that of a wise man, when *he* intercepts the ordinary course of the laws of matter, will be a *wise* intervention. If man, with his feeble mind, can do thus much by merely willing it, then, *à fortiori*, there would seem no sufficient reason for any peremptory decision of modern rationalism about the incredibility and impossibility of miracles on *this* ground. If human will can do thus much among the phenomena of matter, it certainly seems hard to deny that the Divine Will can easily do much more.

What then is it, I inquire again, which makes you so confident of the absolute truth of this principle, or rather, I should say, has suggested this obstinate 'turn of thought,'—that a miracle is impossible, either *per se*, or because it is *certain* God has never wrought one, and never will? I apprehend that the reason, and the sole reason, when matters are searched to the very bottom, is just the reason given by Hume, and by all the Deists of the last century: namely,— that

we have not witnessed any such event; that it is contrary to *experience*, that is, is contrary to *our* experience. In our little day, and in our little sphere, (it is freely admitted,) such phenomena have not been presented to us.

This, I say, in spite of the attempts to evade the refutation of Hume's principle, by stating it in other forms, is the ground of the presumption; that is, it is a pure assumption founded on the contracted views which man gains from his present experience, and which, as usual, he is inclined 'to make the measure of all things.' In other words, it is an *idolum tribûs*—the prejudice of a particular class of minds, and of the habits engendered by their pursuits.

But since the principle, as nakedly stated by Hume, has been so often refuted, no wonder that strenuous attempts are made to get rid of the difficulties with which its reception is embarrassed. That these attempts are very necessary is apparent enough. For if, in reply to the assertion, that a miracle is 'contradictory to experience,' it is asked, What is meant by that 'experience?' the fallacy is at once detected. If we ask the objectors, 'Whose experience do you mean? is it that of yourselves? that of the generality of men? that of all mankind?' then, whichever answer be returned, (and one of them must,) the reply is equally conclusive. If the objector says he means his *own* experience, the answer is, 'Did we ever say that *you*

had seen a miracle? We neither thought nor said that your experience ever had any contact with the miraculous, any more than we suspected you of "setting the Thames on fire:" so far from being at issue with you, we agree with you.' If the answer be, 'I mean the experience of the *generality* of mankind in all times,' the rejoinder is, 'We quite agree with you. By the very definition of a miracle, it *must* be a rare event; if common, it were none. It will therefore *not* be consonant with the general experience of mankind.' If the objector says, lastly, 'I mean the experience of every man that ever was or will be born into the world,' then the simple answer is, 'That is plainly begging the question. Neither you, nor we, can answer for the experience of every man that has been born into the world. That is clearly to make your "experience the measure of all things."'

But supposing the objector be permitted to say that a miracle is incredible, because *uniform* and *universal experience* pronounces against it: still, he is completely refuted if he be only allowed to have his own way. For all that it is needful to say is: 'Stick to that then; declare that the world never had a beginning, and will never have an end; that the time never was when our globe did not exhibit that same aspect—that same series of antecedents and consequents—which it does at this hour; that there was no *first* man; that man has been an eternal series.' But *that*, with the facts

of modern science before him, or even the fancies of modern science,—with the truths of geology, or the errors of the Transmutationists,—he cannot and dare not say. Then does he not admit that which, by *his own definition*, is tantamount to miracle?—How does he evade it? Why, he begins to endeavour to show that though the world has existed in *totally different* states from the present—states of which we have had no experience,—though totally different species of animals from those now seen have lived and have passed away, yet all this is by a gradual law of natural development, by slow secular changes which are *analogous* to changes going on now! And thus it is that a late writer thinks it would have been much better if Hume had used the word '*analogy*' instead of '*experience*'!

But where is the 'analogy' any more than the 'experience'? If there ever was an *origin* of the universe; if your three or four 'primordial forms' ever *began to be*; if they have been the humble larvæ out of which the infinite varieties of animated beings have been evolved; if in accordance with that theory man was first developed out of a monkey, and perhaps may in due time be developed into a winged animal with ten senses and a head on each shoulder, what have we seen in *analogy*, any more than in *experience*, consonant with all this? If all our experience may be thus turned upside-down; if anything may become anything; if fishes may become birds, and birds monkeys, and

monkeys men ; in a word, if by any change, however small at each step, and through whatsoever length of time, a revolution ten times more wonderful than anything Ovid's Metamorphoses describe may really have taken place in the world ; if all this may be according to law, and because according to law, *not* contradictory to experience, or (if you will) to analogy ; then, as before, it is hard to say what *is* contradictory to experience or analogy, and why we may not believe a miracle to be not contrary to experience or analogy, as well as anything else. It is in vain to attempt to refine, as many have done, about the term 'law.' A law which thus admits of all sorts of unknown consequents from all sorts of unknown antecedents, is surely rather the absence of all law ; and an experience which supposes all our *present* experience to be nullified or reversed, is not the same as, but the contrary of, our experience.

If the origination of all things, or the transmutation of species, be in any sense consonant to experience or analogy, what miracle can possibly violate them?

In these 'transmutations' you profess to believe ; and it is impossible to deny that the phenomena as completely set at defiance all the uniformities of experience or analogy, as any miracle in the world. It is in vain to argue, as you do, 'Oh ! these changes were wrought by infinitesimal steps through millions of millions of years.' Not to repeat what I have just said, that your

antecedents and consequents are as completely antipodal to all the 'uniformities' open to our observation, as it is possible to imagine in the case of any miracle in the world; not to mention that the postulate by which it is sought to give some plausibility to these assumptions,—namely, that millions of ages have perhaps been employed in effecting the results, and that each step has been infinitesimal and the whole course continuous,—is a pure creation of imagination, and involves a flagrant departure from the sobriety of the inductive philosophy; not to urge that it is just like saying, 'I believe this, not from observed facts or experience, but because I do not know but such things might be effected by unknown causes operating through indefinite duration;'—not to insist on all this, I would particularly press on your attention that this question of the *time* required for these wondrous changes has really nothing to do with the nature, the character, of the events themselves; the real, the vital question between us is, whether the events do not altogether transcend the sphere of all known 'uniformities' and the entire range of the present laws of nature, as known to *observation and experience*. *That* is the real question; and as to *that*, I presume that the metamorphose of a tadpole into a man, whether it be ten years or a thousand or a million in being brought about, is quite as transcendental to all experience as any miracle of the New Testament. Now it is in this

incompatibility with experience that the supposed incredibility of a miracle consists ; and if it be incredible, then I contend that the phenomena in question are incredible also. Yet you believe them *credible.* Then you do in fact believe that which is of the essence of a miracle, as much as I do.

It is futile to say that the edge of this is taken off by the very *gradual* operation of laws, — by the supposition of their working through unnumbered ages ; for, according to that, the miracle of Lazarus might be supposed credible, if our Saviour had only been ten thousand years about it ! If it be said, that in the former case certain unknown intermediate changes may be supposed to have been wrought in that long succession of time, I reply, 'And for anything you know, some unknown intermediate changes might, in the case of a miracle, be wrought by Omnipotence in an indefinitely brief time.' In either case, we suppose unknown forces producing effects which transcend all experience ; which stand opposed to all the uniformities of present observation : only in the one case, these forces operate more quickly, in the other more slowly ; but both phenomena are alike beyond the sphere of our experience. It is the *character* of the event that constitutes the miracle, and not the time occupied in producing it.'

I observe that, in common with many writers of the present day, you speak of Time as if it were some

efficient cause, or agent, in producing any change. Surely it is merely one of the conditions of it, and will be longer or shorter, where the change is just the same, according to the variation of the force. A flower may slowly expand in the open air, or unfold in half the time in a hothouse: it is not the time, but something else, that makes the difference.

I observe that you naturally fight shy of the idea of the *origin* of the universe, and strive to get rid of the question by saying it is a transcendental notion,—as undoubtedly it is; or by hiding it away in such exceedingly remote abysses of time, that the imagination as well as the reason shall be deterred from going in search of it! But it will not do. However transcendental the idea of origination may be, (as I freely acknowledge it is,) still I apprehend your 'primordial forms' must bring you to it at last. And if the universe ever began, then though it may have been enclosed in a germ no bigger than the millionth part of a pin's head, and all the plants and animals may have grown out of it by the efficacy of the 'invariable cosmical' laws, still I suppose that the *origination* of the first living organism, with all these possibilities of infinite results enclosed in it, was something as wonderful as any miracle can be. It cannot be called, indeed, a violation or suspension of the laws of nature, because there happened to be no laws of nature to suspend; but it would be hard to say that the origination of all

such laws was less contradictory to, or incompatible with, all experience and analogy than the suspension or violation of any one of them.

In a word, it is utterly vain for you (turn and twist and wind as you will) to say, that creation or origination, or those stupendous transmutations which you avowedly believe (though antipodal to all experience), are 'not the same as miracles.' Both the one and the other are (and this is the real point in the argument) directly transcendental to all our experience; and by Hume's definition, therefore, must be equally *incredible*, whether you choose to call them 'miraculous' or not. And if you admit the one class of phenomena, I may well ask with Paul—'*Why* should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?'

When I come, therefore, to analyse the reasons for this extraordinary assertion of yourself and so many others, that a miracle is *per se* utterly incredible, I find it possible to account for it only by saying that it is the 'turn of thought' derived from that *present* experience, which we are disposed to make the measure of all things; a prejudice of philosophy, but not the less unreasonable for all that, and really as shallow as any prejudice of the vulgar.

VI. Another singular article in your scientific creed, as in that of many others in these times, is an anticipation, not merely of the *indefinite* progress

of man in the knowledge of the physical world, but that he is destined to know all its mysteries; to penetrate every secret, and account for every phenomenon, however subtle or complex; analyse every compound, ascertain every law and all combinations of laws; and arriving at last at the knowledge of the necessary and inevitable relations of all antecedents and consequents, predict the future as well as record the past; and so pretty nearly regulate for himself a world of which perfect science will have then given him the mastery. Some few indeed have even gone so far as to say, that there being no presiding Deity at present, this is the way in which the world will at last be provided with one: that a God is gradually a-making, and will in *time* (of which, as we have seen, our scientific speculators are so lavish), vindicate his title to be considered such, in virtue of his unlimited knowledge of the universe, and his power over it. And even if there are few of you who go this length, yet many confidently believe from the progress of modern discovery that, to adopt the words of one of them, 'Everything will at last be found out;' or as another says, 'Everything will be known.'

Now, in the name of common sense, what is there in the history of the past, or the condition of the present, to sanction such a notion, except an *idolum tribûs* of a doting philosophy. I believe with you

that man's knowledge (if he but pursue it in the modes, and within the limits which his Creator has prescribed) will be indefinite; but I see no proof whatever that he will ever exhaust the field of physical science any more than any other; or that there are not limits here as in every other department, though we cannot so easily assign them. Assuredly everything in experience and analogy point to this conclusion.

First, the strict limits within which in so many other directions most of these very speculators would confine even the *possibilities* of knowledge; the number of subjects on which they say it is in vain for man to speculate at all; the large domains in which they themselves protest science can never set a foot (though it is precisely in these, by the way, that man has not only been most prone to speculate in all ages, but in which he chiefly desires to know), ought to suggest a different lesson. Granting the absolute impossibility, as you affirm, of knowing anything of 'causes,' or of 'substances,' the utter vanity of all speculation and discussion touching the essence of matter or of mind, or the relations of cause and effect; granting the impossibility of attaining certitude on these and kindred subjects, and that these are 'tabooed' to the whole race, should it not suggest the probable fallacy of your predictions of man's ultimate perfect knowledge of all the mysteries of

physical nature? Surely it would seem more natural, reasoning from analogy, to expect there are limits here also, unless there be something in the constitution of man's mind, or his relations to nature, which justifies a contrary conclusion as regards these subjects.

But, so far from this, we are painfully taught its improbability, if we consider the limitations of our senses and our faculties of all kinds;—that they limit us in the field of physical investigation, as in every other. In every other direction, you confess, man soon reaches the tether of his powers and faculties; why should you suppose that there is no limit here? As his strength is absolute weakness,—as a baby to a Titan,—confronted with the mighty forces of nature, why should he imagine his intellect in any greater ratio to the mysteries which lie enshrouded in her depths? or his knowledge of the secrets he has penetrated more than infinitesimal compared with his ignorance of the mysteries she conceals? Nor is the consideration of the limits of his physical organisation, without instruction on this very point. Even if he had *intellectual* powers equal to the task you propose, his physical nature soon imposes an effectual limit on his knowledge. He cannot descend into the depths of the earth or the ocean, nor soar into the heavens; he can but guess at the mysteries of the subterranean world, and would be shrivelled up like a

leaf in the fire if he could only descend a few miles from the surface; he can guess, still more feebly at the mysteries of the myriads of shining worlds that surround him. It is doubtful whether he will ever be able *absolutely* to decide the question, recently so strongly debated, whether the planets be inhabited or not; still less by what beings, and on what conditions. If it be said that these are vast and distant fields, and it is their vastness and distance that seclude them from man's knowledge, this is true; but still they are among the mysteries of the physical universe. But, in point of fact, we have similar limits in the minute as in the vast. We stand, as Pascal says, between the two infinitudes, — the infinitely great and the infinitely little; and the telescope and the microscope alike reveal to us a series of wonders, of which, whether we take the ascending or the descending scale, we see no prospect of coming to an end.

In like manner, when we get beyond a certain degree, whether of subtlety or complexity or rapidity of movement in the phenomena submitted to us, the power of our senses, of our observation, of all our faculties, and of every appliance by which we can aid them, desert us: and we are just as completely baffled as we are in other departments less open to us. Subtlety and complexity in the phenomena as effectually restrict us here, as in other departments the inscrutable *nature* or the inaccessible *remoteness* of

the phenomena. Thus, for example, if we ask whether matter is indefinitely divisible, or if not, what is the ultimate configuration of its particles, or what the constitution of matter itself (strictly, not metaphysical, but purely physical problems), no one would pretend any ground to hope that the time will come when we shall be able to give the answer. Similarly, however far science may analyse the composite, it does not know when it has reached the limit: and what at last seems absolutely simple, may be but a more subtle compound, the elements of which evade all our research, and escape us in forms of still greater tenuity. Similarly, in the structure of living organisms there are ten thousand mysteries which we in vain attempt to explain, and many of which palpably lie beyond us. The natural sciences seem only too certain to overload all memory by their accumulations long before a thousandth part of their realms is fully explored.

In short, go where he will, man soon finds, unless lost, (as he is too apt to be,) in self-adoration, that he is shut up within impassable and adamantine barriers; or from all that he knows, can only infer that all his discoveries but open fresh mysteries to be explored. Continual enlargement of his knowledge is attended with a proportionate enlargement of the knowledge of his remaining ignorance. Nothing yields any sign or suspicion that we are coming

to the end of all that is *knowable*, in the domain of physical science, or any other.

In a word, if we compare the position and faculties of man with the boundless fields of God's universe, we shall no longer wonder at the simplicity of Newton's beautiful confession,—so worthy of the humility as well as aspirations of true science,—'I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself with finding now and then a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me;'—a speech conceived in the spirit of the still sublimer language of the Patriarch, who, after his magnificent eulogium of some of the chief wonders of God's handiwork, adds—'These are but a whisper of his ways; but the thunder of his power who can understand?'

The faculties of man are exquisitely adapted to his position, and consequently to his well-being; and they provide no doubt for his indefinite progress in knowledge: but they evidently have no proportion or relation to his absolute mastery of nature. Well says Pascal: 'Manque d'avoir contemplé ces infinis, les hommes se sont portés témérairement à la recherche de la nature, comme s'ils avaient quelque proportion avec elle.'

And again: 'Notre intelligence tient dans l'ordre

des choses intelligibles le même rang que notre corps dans l'étendue de la nature.'

While you are anticipating that science will master all the secrets of the universe, and imagining that you are only indulging a vision authorised by the bold language of Bacon, it would be well to reflect on what that same great genius, equally daring and cautious, also affirms;—that whatever the triumphs which may be anticipated for man, 'the subtlety of Nature far transcends the subtlety of either sense or intellect.'

ANCIENT AND MODERN WISDOM:

REFLECTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER OF THE BOOK OF JOB.

ANCIENT AND MODERN WISDOM:

REFLECTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER OF THE BOOK OF JOB.

FULL though the Book of Job is of sublimity, there is probably no part of it more sublime than the twenty-eighth chapter, in which the patriarch, after reciting some of the principal achievements of which the daring genius and cunning hand of man are capable, and the 'precious, hidden treasures' which reward his enterprise, affirms that there is *one* discovery which lies beyond the uttermost limit of mere sense or intellect, and yet so important, that none of the acquisitions of man's unaided skill and toil can be put in comparison with it. It is implied in the emphatic *refrain* of this sublime effusion of lyric song: 'But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding!' In order to illustrate the great things which man's restless brain and busy hand can achieve, he selects, by way of example, *mining* operations,—which were doubtless in that age, and perhaps may still be considered in our own, among the most

remarkable proofs of human skill, sagacity, perseverance. His description of these, conceived indeed in language of the most exalted poetry, shows that even in that remote age man had made no mean progress in the art of exploring the recesses of the earth, and dragging its treasures to the light of day; of smelting metals, and discovering the 'diamond,' the 'onyx,' and the 'sapphire.' 'There is a path' (the patriarch says) so secret that the 'eagle's' piercing eye has never spied it out, nor that of the 'vulture' seen it; so wild and savage that the 'lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed along it;' but which the keener eye of man, illumined by his lamp of artificial daylight, has descried, and his more daring footsteps explored. With persevering toil, not to be baffled in his insatiable search for the 'treasures of darkness,' he 'putteth forth his hand upon the rock, and overturneth the mountains by the roots.' Unappalled by the roar of subterranean waters, he 'binds the floods from overflowing,' or diverts them from their course by 'cutting out rivers among the rocks.' And so, compelling all his faculties to drudge in the service of his passion for material wealth, he triumphs over the most formidable obstacles, and bends or breaks all the forces of nature that oppose his will, till at length his miner's lamp flashes on the unsunned 'treasures of darkness,' on the 'place of sapphires, and of the golden ore.' But still, though man can thus descend

to the depths of the earth and fetch untold riches thence, these trophies of his intellect, enterprise, and dauntless courage, constitute not his *summum bonum.* And, therefore, 'where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?' 'The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me.'

Nor are the spoils thus gotten at the price of infinite pains, toil, and danger, worthy of being appraised with it: 'It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it; nor shall the exchange of it be for jewels of fine gold; no mention shall be made of' the less precious 'coral or pearls,' inasmuch as 'the price of wisdom is above rubies.'

And once more the patriarch asks, 'Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding?'

For answer, this time, comes one of the sublimest verses in the whole chapter: 'Destruction and death say, We have heard the *fame* thereof with our ears.' They can but indistinctly mutter hearsay rumours of what they cannot *know*; their desolate solitudes can but echo the voice of that supernal 'Wisdom,' in virtue of which, if she dwelt there, they would be 'solitudes' and 'desolate' no longer; for this true

Wisdom has immortality for her dower, and whoso 'findeth her, findeth *life*.'

And at length comes the answer to the oft-repeated question: 'Whence then cometh wisdom?'—'God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof;' for He, who formed this whole vast system of things, and gave all things their laws and limits, who prescribed to the 'winds' and 'waters' their just 'weight' and 'measure,' who 'made a decree for the rain, and a path for the lightning of thunder,' He 'saw and declared it.' He, who was the author of all *physical* nature, also prescribed to his rational creatures the laws and conditions of their *moral* nature, in virtue of which alone they can find life and felicity: 'And unto man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding!' It does not consist in mere knowledge; it cannot be obtained by exploring the mysteries of the outward world, or attaining dominion over nature; by acquiring any of the forms of material good, or pushing physical science or civilisation to the uttermost; but by conforming to the great laws of our moral being. In proportion as these are complied with, man's true perfection and felicity, as essentially consisting in this conformity to the will of God and consequent 'departure from evil' will be secured.

And not only so, but all other advantages will be

most easily attained and most stably preserved by the same means,—meaner felicities being but part of the dower and retinue of virtue; while in proportion as the above moral conditions are violated, will such inferior good be lost or rendered insecure. All the forms of this inferior good are more naturally, indeed, the allies of Virtue, and the best (such, for example, as health or reputation) cannot even exist where she is wholly absent; but they are most of them capable of being sequestered from her. They are in *themselves* indifferent, being intrinsically void of moral significance; they are all capable of being used or abused—made subservient to moral good or moral evil. They may be, every one of them, simply the instrument of virtue or vice, just as gold may be used to reward or corrupt, or a sword to defend a man's life or take that of another. Even the electric telegraph, perhaps the sublimest trophy of man's skill, and so potent an implement of civilisation, is as ready to flash along its wires falsehood as truth. Except as guarded by honesty at both ends, it becomes a huge serpentine coil of delusion and mischief; nothing better than a more diffusive and comprehensive lie, winged with lightning, and capable of compassing in an instant sea and land. Like every other appliance of civilisation, it is good or bad only as virtue or vice infuses into the subtle fluid it conveys, the still more potent moral element of truth or falsehood.

The Bible, in every part of it, is full of the same great lesson, and affirms that this Wisdom,—so mysterious and inaccessible, if it be sought in the wrong place or in the wrong way; which cannot be gained by diving into the depths of the earth, or by soaring into the heavens,—is equally plain and obvious if we but look nearer home, and listen to the voice which speaks to us, not through external nature, but in the very laws of our moral constitution, especially as these are expounded and enforced in the volume of revelation: 'To *man*, God saith, the fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.'

The same lesson is inculcated in those impressive words of Moses: 'For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the seas, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. See, I have set before thee this day Life and Good, and Death and Evil.'

The principal, the *highest*, proof that this is man's true Wisdom, is found in that *essential* felicity which the course it prescribes can *of itself* give; that felicity

with which virtue, *as such* (to use Butler's expression), fills the soul by its very presence and possession, quite apart from any secondary benefits; and which made even a heathen philosopher truly say that 'Virtue is herself the soul's best recompense.' But this Wisdom comes not undowered to those who embrace her. In all ways, it tends to the development and perfection of every principle and faculty of our nature; and hence we are told in the Proverbs that 'Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour.'

And as this conformity with the great moral laws of his nature must constitute the perfection and felicity of every individual man, so must it of any number of individuals; and as nations are but collections of units, so must it of communities also; and therefore the Book again tells us, that 'righteousness alone exalteth a nation.'

It is true that God promised the ancient Israelites, by express donation, a blessing beyond the issues of his ordinary Providence, if they would but exactly 'obey his laws, and walk in his ways;' that 'He would raise them on high above the nations of the earth, andmake their way prosperous.' But it is not difficult to see, that if the demands of this true wisdom be complied with by any community, if the laws of man's moral constitution be obeyed, and in proportion as they are so, their natural *tendency* is to secure the elements

of inferior, that is, of intellectual and material, good. This, indeed, is the obvious *tendency*, (though not uniformly realized,) even in the case of individuals; but in communities it is a tendency which never fails. Virtue in the *individual*, does not necessarily involve outward well-being, though to be vicious in any marked degree does involve the loss of it; but so certain, as a general rule and on the great scale, is the operation of God's moral laws, that in proportion as they are obeyed, (other things being equal, nay, often when very unequal,) will communities be prosperous, and in proportion as virtue decays, will the foundations of that prosperity be sapped, till the fabric itself at last sink in ruin. Uncertain and precarious as we are apt to think the operation of the moral laws by which God governs the world, they are incomparably more stable and uniform than any others whatsoever into which the element we call 'contingency' enters at all, or which have influence on human happiness. To employ an expression which I have used elsewhere:—Take a hundred *intelligent* men, or a hundred *rich* men, or even a hundred *free* men: while there is no one of any sense who would venture to say he had any sufficient data for calculating their success or happiness from these elements alone, there is no man who would not take any odds that of a hundred *honest*, *industrious*, *upright* men, the vast majority were certain to do well. That is true, for ever, which Milton

so beautifully says, 'Lordship and victory are but the pages of truth, justice, and honour.'

While nothing can produce a deeply radicated and uniform virtue, but that regard to the Supreme Lawgiver which the patriarch makes correlative to 'the departing from evil,' and both of which conjointly constitute this 'wisdom' *par excellence*; while it is true that 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of it,' and the *love* of Him, its consummation; yet it is also true, that even the inferior forms of virtue,—*i.e.*, virtuous actions and habits, performed under the influence of inferior motives, (such is the regard which God has for the moral laws on which he administers the world,) shall be sufficient to determine the social well-being of communities; and their opposites, their social ruin.

In an age like the present, and in a nation like ours, in which the various forms of intellectual and material good are more and more pursued and cherished; in which the advance of knowledge, the progress of science, the extension of commerce, the increase of wealth, are sometimes spoken of almost as if they could constitute collectively the *summum bonum* of mankind, and would ensure prosperity independently of the moral conditions to which reference has just been made; or at all events, as if those conditions were of less consequence than the Bible says they are; it is perhaps well to reflect upon the lesson in this chapter

in Job: especially as there is a class of speculators (though happily a small one) disposed to follow in the wake of a great but exceedingly erratic genius, who suddenly appeared among us like a meteor a few years ago, and as suddenly passed away. This philosopher held that the progress of civilisation is principally dependent on the progress of 'knowledge;' and that of the *two* elements of knowledge—the 'moral' and the 'intellectual'—on which human improvement hinges, the former is comparatively insignificant. He affirmed that it was a constant and invariable quantity, while the latter was capable of indefinite expansion; that all mankind had always been possessed of the same amount of *ethical* knowledge, (if the argument is to be worth a button, they must also be supposed to have equally *applied* it,) whereas the accumulations of scientific 'knowledge' may be without limit.

It is hard to say which is the greatest of four almost equally transparent sophisms, involved in this singular argument; first, of supposing, (so palpably contrary to fact,) that the ethical 'knowledge' of men, their speculative codes of morals, may be regarded as a 'constant or invariable quantity:' secondly, of overlooking the fact that even if it were so, the true question (as already hinted) as to the bearing of morality on human improvement is not, What has been the abstract *knowledge* of man on the subject? what his

speculative theory? but, as in other practical sciences, (navigation, or medicine, for example,) What is the degree in which it has been practically applied, and exhibited in action? Thirdly, of forgetting that if this be not made the real question, then, on the same condition, any *other* branch of knowledge in which the conclusions are universally admitted, might with equal reason be represented as a 'constant quantity,' and of comparatively little importance to civilisation; for it is only as it is practically *applied*, that it is of value in relation to ulterior progress, or can become the stepping-stone to further discoveries. Fourthly, of representing moral illumination, which is an inseparable condition—a *sine quâ non*—both of the very existence of human communities, and of their progress, as a less important element in the problem than intellectual or scientific knowledge, simply because the knowledge in the one case is supposed to be complete, and in the other, not; —forgetting that the difference in the *nature* of the two may more than compensate for the difference in *volume*.

That these fallacies are all involved in this speculation, may be evinced in a very few words, and more would be superfluous; for however mischievous the aspects of the theory to which I now refer, on morals and religion, there is little fear of its imposing on the sound common-sense of Englishmen. Of the more elaborate critiques which the brilliant but eccentric speculations now adverted to called forth, I scarcely

recollect one which did not, as by instinct, and without always fully going into the reasons, single out this paradox, amidst a crowd of others, for emphatic condemnation.

First, then, this strange theory affirms that morals have been known, nearly, if not quite as well, in all ages and countries: so that moral truth is an invariable or unfluctuating, and therefore comparatively uninfluential, element in the progress of civilisation! Surely it is impossible not to demur to this statement as a matter of *fact*; though (as already said) if it *were* a fact, the real point for consideration, (in virtue of the practical character of morals,) is not how far they have been theoretically known, but how far they have been applied. But it may well be denied that morals, even as a theory, have been equally well known, or nearly equally well known, by all mankind in all ages. Indeed, it is perfectly astounding that any one can survey either the moral theories or the moral phenomena of the world, and affirm any such paradox. What! Have there not been thousands of speculators who, from the very diversity of the maxims and conduct of mankind, have doubted whether man has any moral nature at all? And have there not been ethical theories unblushingly founded on that very supposition? *i.e.* on the supposition that any code of morals is just the result of man's education, association, and varying notions of interest and expe-

diency, and that all intrinsical moral distinctions, and all immutable moral obligations, are a vain dream? Again; is it possible to suppose that the savage who commits murder and indulges in cannibalism without shame and without remorse,' is really on much the same level with a Socrates or a Plato, as regards his *knowledge* of morals? Or is a code which consecrates revenge, and hands it down as an heir-loom, which consecrates theft, which consecrates murder, which consecrates piracy, just as good as every other? Or if it be said that we must not go to the lowest condition of barbarism,—though in truth the argument admits of no such evasion, because it is professedly and essentially without limitations,—can we imagine that the theories of Plato or Aristotle, the first of whom pleaded, in his Utopian 'Republic,' for the community of women, and occasional infanticide; and both of whom would perpetuate and legalise slavery as a perfectly justifiable institution, and spoke with lenience and indulgence of vices that cannot be even 'named among Christians,'—can we imagine that their theories are on the same level with moral codes which condemn all these things? Is it possible to imagine that those who, without a blush, sanctioned and practised the vices which distinguished the palmy days of Greek civilisation, and disgraced it, or the last ages of Roman civilisation, which could not well be disgraced,—vices which Paul has denounced in

the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and which are so lightly referred to in the pages of such writers as Lucian and Athenæus,—were as enlightened even in the *theory* of morals as the devout reader of the New Testament? I suppose not.

I fancy most men would be inclined to take a very different view of the matter, and say, that true though it be that the moral conceptions of mankind in general approximate more nearly to equality than their measures of intellectual or scientific enlightenment, yet there are great differences in their moral illumination notwithstanding; and that though men have generally been worse than their *theories* of morals, yet it is to be hoped, even in the interest of charity, that the worst classes of men have not been *quite* as plenarily enlightened as the best! This author was so anxious to prove the contrary, and to show that the New Testament is nothing, after all, in an ethical point of view, but a repetition of what the world was perfectly familiar with, that he did not hesitate to say,—'The system of morals propounded there contains no maxim which had not been previously enunciated: and that some of the most beautiful passages in the Apostolic writings are quotations from Pagan authors, is well known to every scholar.' It must be confessed he gives but an indifferent specimen of his own scholarship in this ludicrous assertion; since, as has been well said in reply, the obligations of the Apostles to

the Pagan writers are confined to the three short sayings—'For we are also his offspring'—'Evil communications corrupt good manners'—and 'The Cretans are always liars!'

But, *secondly*, another fallacy in this representation of the inferior relative importance of moral truth, to the progress of man and the advance of civilisation, consists in this;—that it utterly ignores the fact that morals, being a practical science,—the value of which does not consist in theoretic knowledge at all,—must, if we would estimate what it can or cannot do, be viewed in its *applications* and its *tendencies*. The question here is not how much men know, but how far they use their knowledge. It is here, as with medical science; *that* also, being practical, is of no value, except as it is applied; and may safely be represented not only as of little, but of no influence on human welfare, if men be resolved to disregard its principles and refuse its prescriptions. The only way in which the objection to this author's theory, drawn from the *practical* character of Morality, can be obviated, so as to show that it is still a 'constant' and unvarying, and therefore comparatively 'inferior' element in human progress, is to double the original paradox, and affirm not only that men have an equal *knowledge* of morality, but have always practised it, and will always practise it, in the same invariable degree; that there has always been, and will always be, the same

amount of virtue and vice, good and evil action, in the world! But though the patron of this speculation seems sometimes to express himself as though he thought so, it is to be presumed that one who auspicates such magnificent things of the progress of his species, could not seriously mean it; for if he did, it is difficult to see why he should have written his book at all, since on this theory the world in the most essential points must remain incapable of amelioration!

But, *thirdly*, if we represent morality as a stationary and constant element, obstinately looking at it merely as knowledge, and refusing to consider it as capable of indefinite practical applications, then (as already intimated by more than one critic) any *other* science, as well as morals, would equally deserve to be represented as a *sterile and profitless* province of human knowledge. It is so necessarily, unless we suppose it constantly applied in practice, and thus constantly facilitating the further development and application of other branches of knowledge, in virtue of that 'common bond' which (as Cicero long ago observed) connects together the whole family of the sciences. Take, for example, the elements of Geometry. So far as discovered and recorded, they would be, except as practically applied, a stationary, constant element of our knowledge. Take, again, the science of Mechanics; it has long since investigated, and

reduced to mathematical formulæ, the conditions of equilibrium and motion; the endless new books that treat of it give us only in somewhat varied form, with more or less clearness, the same principles and demonstrations of the same science. If it be said that though the body of truths in Euclid's 'Elements' or Newton's 'Principia' does not vary, yet that these truths are continually facilitating the more successful development and application of man's general powers, —in subserviency to the practical arts, or as stepping-stones to the advancement of other branches of science, or even to the formation of new sciences,—this is all quite true; but it is much the same with morality considered as an *applied* science: only that this last has, in proportion as it is applied to life, incomparably greater, more diffusive, and more uniform influence over the whole powers of man.

And this leads me to the *fourth* fallacy; namely, that of concluding that a constant and invariable 'element' in a result,—even though it be an absolute *sine quâ non*, without which the result cannot exist at all,—is necessarily of inferior importance to another element, merely because the latter may admit of indefinite enlargement. For if, as is the case with morals, the things thus represented as invariable are the essential condition of all advancement, and if in proportion as they are practically applied they will and must promote it, they may well be of more moment

to the result than any special contributions to the sum of our knowledge. In fact, it might just as well be argued that our intellectual *faculties*, all of which have very narrow limits compared with the knowledge they are the instruments of accumulating for us; or that the 'five senses,' which are possessed by the generality of the race in far more unvarying perfection than a knowledge of morals, and applied with far greater practical diligence; which are always a constant quantity,—no art or skill enabling us to make them *six*; it might, I say, just as well be argued that all these are of less importance to human advancement than the *facts* of which they inform us, simply because to the number of these last we cannot set limits! A man who so argued would forget that the very accumulation of such facts would be impossible,—that the whole pile would vanish,—without these essential, though unvarying *organa* of knowledge.

And in like manner it may be shown that even if it were true as it is false, that the knowledge of morality was a constant quantity, men without it would be incapable of any steady progress. Concurrent action, mutual confidence, the conscientious use of our faculties, the tranquil pursuit of knowledge, security of property, and the stability of society itself, could be no longer hoped for.

Viewed in this light, we may, on purely logical

grounds, claim for morals a more important, because more essential place, in determining the conditions of man's progress and civilisation, than for intellect itself. It is granted, indeed, that the increase of knowledge must be supposed constant, as well as a constant practical advance in morals, if man is really to make solid, permanent, perpetual progress. But this I think may further be said;—that the moral element is not only just as *essential* to any degree of civilisation, but is more expansive in its effects in proportion to its influence, equally augments man's general power in proportion to that influence, and, *cæteris paribus*, would always insure the certain superiority of any community possessing it in a high degree, over one possessed of *equal*, and in time even over one possessed of *greater* intellectual power, if endowed with inferior virtue.

1. It is just as *essential* an element to any civilisation. This is obvious; for if men were universally destitute of moral virtue, and of the mutual confidence, and power of conjoint action, that it alone can secure, there could be no more progress than is found in a prison of felons, or a den of lions. Even the champion of this singular speculation admits that men in general must have had more virtue than vice, for if it were *not* so, all progress would have been impossible; the race would have been destroyed, and not a soul left to mourn over man's degeneracy. Now

although, if we take 'virtue' in the most comprehensive sense, as embracing the entire scope of man's duties towards God, as well as towards his fellows, every Christian would deny the assertion that man has more virtue than vice; yet, in that restricted sense in which alone our author seems to recognise virtue as possible, it may be admitted. It will be cheerfully acknowledged that there are more deeds daily performed (from whatsoever motives), which comply with at least the *letter* of the laws of virtue, than the contrary; more truth spoken than lies—more acts of honesty than dishonesty—more people that pay their debts than cheat their creditors; and so on. If it were not so, the world must soon come to an end. The moral element is, therefore, just as *essential* to all civilisation as knowledge and intellect; more so in one respect, inasmuch as man, strong by the culture of his moral nature, might, even if possessed of feebler intellectual powers than he has, make an indefinite, though it might be slower, progress in knowledge and civilisation; whereas, apart from such culture, even the highest intellectual powers would be but explosive and disorganising forces, and prevent any stable progress in civilisation altogether.

2. But this is but a small part of the case. Not only is morality an equally essential condition of all civilisation: as a *practical* science—the true light in which to consider it—it is capable of indefinite appli-

cations. It secures, in proportion to its advance, in proportion to its influence over human life and character, not a uniform but a constantly accelerating impulse to man's progress, a constantly increasing force to the sum of his intellectual efforts. Unhappily the world has never yet seen what wonderful things a rapid, solid, general advance in a thorough and consistent virtue could effect; but it is not a matter of theory, nor left to conjecture. All we have to do is to recur to our consciousness, and the experience of life, in order to see how much is lost by vice, or by an imperfect virtue, and to form an adequate conception of what would be the result, if all such moral obstacles to man's progress were taken out of the way. And perhaps the best way of forming a lively notion of the dependence of intellectual progress on morals, and of the constantly increasing momentum that successive advances in virtue would give to the sum of the powers lodged in the human intellect, is to suppose its abstract tendencies all realized in some favoured community. Let us imagine, then, a society in which no man defrauds his neighbour, idles away his time, or impairs his health or his faculties by vice; no man who makes his neighbours lose their time or waste their ingenuity or property, in guarding against his proving a knave, or squanders his own time and ingenuity in guarding against the villainy of his neighbours; a community in which

each man, in the exercise of perfect trust and confidence in others, and of inflexible rectitude of purpose in himself, is left in unmolested liberty, safe from outward fears and from internal distractions, to devote his undivided energies to whatever can adorn, elevate, strengthen, and exalt humanity. Who can estimate the effect of thus setting free the entire energies of man in the pursuit of a higher civilisation? How incalculable the gain, even in means and time, for the further prosecution of knowledge; in the mere freedom from the necessity of guarding against our reciprocal wickedness! We should see a community in which no prisons need to be built or governed; in which no criminal law need be devised or administered; in which no criminal courts need be held; in which no armies need be levied nor paid for, nor (which is worst of all) consumed in war: in which none of the tremendous burdens incurred by war, would be felt or dreaded;—burdens which absorb half the revenues of nations, occupy half the time of their senates, and in no inconsiderable degree destroy their population. If it be said that the energies thus exerted do in some degree promote civilisation by quickening the human mind, it may be granted; but I am afraid it must be called the devil's civilisation; and, at any rate, such a result is but a poor one compared with what might be attained by equal resources more legitimately employed; by as much thought, time, money, energy,

tranquilly exerted on worthy objects under the direction of a perfect virtue.

Now if these abstract tendencies of virtue would, when *perfectly* realised, thus immeasurably enhance man's power, so will they in *proportion* as they are realised. And who can say with truth, that it is a less expansive element of progressive civilisation than knowledge?

3. It may be said that it is not only an equally expansive element, but that it is more than *co-ordinate* with knowledge in the result. Virtue is so potent that not only will it secure greater progress in that one of two communities which possesses most of it, supposing intellect to be equal; but it will and must insure in time greater progress in that same community, even though intellect be inferior, unless that inferiority be enormous.

And here may be applied the reasoning of Butler in reference to the issues of any contest between mere Force and Reason, which he employs as an illustration of a somewhat similar proposition,—namely, the tendency of virtue to triumph over all power opposed to it, if time be given it. As to the contest between brute force and intelligence, he truly says that, let there be time enough and field enough, and anything like a *proportion* between the forces engaged, and the victory will infallibly remain with Reason. It *might* happen, he says, that a few men, landing on a desert island,

might be surprised and overcome by lions, or other wild animals; and even if they were not disproportioned in *numbers*, yet unless time and opportunity were allowed to concert measures and give effect to that intrinsic superiority which Reason must ever possess over brute force, the same result might ensue. Yet in the end, as he says, every one can see that Reason must (the above-named conditions of the contest being fulfilled) ultimately prevail.

Something like this may be said of the contest between Virtue and Intellect in a race of civilisation. Supposing time enough allowed for the experiment, and no monstrous disproportion between the intellectual power of two communities, and yet considerable disparity in virtue, that society in which most virtue resides, would in the end (though it might work onwards more slowly) secure a more solid and permanent civilisation than its antagonist; and if possessed of *perfect* virtue must, even with considerable inferiority in the sum total of intellectual force, outstrip its competitor;—not perhaps in the brilliancy of particular discoveries, but in the steady, solid, and durable advance in all that can really constitute the elevation of man. For, *such* civilisation would be attended with no drawbacks, be liable to no suspension, be exposed to no shipwreck,—as civilisation has more than once been when virtue has decayed, no matter what the intellect which has produced it, or which may adorn

it to the last. None of the time, talents, energies of the community would be wasted or lost. Whatever was once gained would be gained for ever; progress would know no retrogression; it would be a steady unbroken march 'through the ages,'—even as we may conceive it will be in that world where the conflicting claims of all the elements of our nature are fully adjusted, and adjusted by each of them knowing its due sphere and office; a world in which what the Apostle says of Faith, Hope, and Charity, here, will be said of Power, Intellect, and Virtue: 'And now abide Power, Intellect, Virtue—these three; but the greatest of these is Virtue.'

One other paradoxical consequence of the speculation now referred to,—involved in the application of a mathematical conception to a subject which does not admit of it,—may just be mentioned. According to this theory, morality is but a constant and unvarying element of civilisation, while knowledge increases *without limit*;—the logical consequence, therefore, arguing on these mathematical principles, must be, that the ratio of the moral to the intellectual element must ultimately be a vanishing quantity!

On the contrary, it may be safely maintained that whatever the vigour of man's intellect or the accumulation of his knowledge, morality must still be the predominant force, if human progress is to be stable and continuous.

THOUGHTS SUGGESTED BY THE RECENT FAILURE OF THE ATLANTIC TELEGRAPH EXPEDITION.

THOUGHTS

SUGGESTED BY THE RECENT FAILURE OF THE ATLANTIC TELEGRAPH EXPEDITION.

THE failure of the recent attempt to lay the Atlantic cable was a grievous disappointment, not only to the eminent men of science who had expended such rare resources of knowledge and skill, and so vast an amount of patience and perseverance, on the great enterprise; not only to the capitalists, who have cast so many hundreds of thousands of pounds into the sea; but to the nation at large. The public took the liveliest interest in its fortunes, and devoured the brief telegrams which for a few days made the heart throb with alternate hope and fear, as greedily as if each man had a personal stake in the venture; it endured the long interval of silence during which it was possible only to conjecture the causes for hearing nothing, and at last hung over the mournful records of the great catastrophe in which so much intellectual and material wealth had been wasted, with little short of the most vivid feelings with which it ever watched the progress

of a great campaign, or waited for the tidings of some decisive battle which was to close it.

Yet the failure need not produce despair of the object's being attained at last, either by this route or some other; nor, if it be taken aright, is it without its valuable lessons.

It need not produce despair;—for if the thing is to be accomplished by human effort at all, and if it will really repay the cost of accomplishing it; in other words, if there be no insurmountable physical obstacles to success, and no conclusive economic reasons for abandoning the project (for, whether it be physically possible or not, it is clear that men will not, unless mad, venture on more than a certain number of such costly experiments), it is certain to be accomplished at last. And we may draw favourable omens from what has ever been the history of similar great enterprises; they have been prosecuted amidst fluctuations of fortune, alternate hopes and fears, and in spite of many failures; but all this, again, has not been without its benefit. It has called forth the virtues of fortitude and patience, and stimulated to higher efforts of invention, in dealing with opposing difficulties: benefits which in nine cases out of ten are yet more valuable than the immediate success of any one project. For the qualities thus elicited are the conditions of all human progress.

And if, as many of us probably cannot but fear,

the project is not to be accomplished by *this* route, it will, doubtless, by some other. The end,—that of linking together the two great continents of Europe and America by the strict bond which telegraphic communication implies,—is so momentous, that the attempt will hardly be abandoned while one spark of hope remains. *Aut viam inveniam, aut faciam*, the enterprising spirit of modern civilisation will say: 'We shall find a road, or make one.'

For surely it would be a strange anomaly if not only the Old Continents, and the New, were each *separately* traversed by that friendly lightning, which is the most subtle product of civilisation and so important an instrument of its further progress, but three out of the four,—Europe, Asia, and Africa,—were linked together by it, while a deep and impassable gulf still separated the Transatlantic hemisphere from ours! Surely it would be a strange anomaly if universal civilisation thus advanced with a lame and limping pace; with Mercury's 'winged sandal' on one foot, and an old shoe on the other; or, like poor Peter Schlemihl, when suddenly surprised by the bear, with the seven-leagued boot on his right leg, and only the ordinary means of locomotion with the other. It would certainly be curious if we were but ten minutes in transmitting our thoughts, however trivial, to the extremities of India or China, or in knocking at the gates of Pekin or Ispahan, while it still took

ten days to convey a message (though the world's peace might hang upon it) to the President of the United States!

And if the project be, as it seems, so necessary to the development of civilisation and the interests of humanity,—at least if these are to advance *pari passu*, —we have every reason to hope that this (and, for similar reasons, many other equally gigantic enterprises) will in time be brought to successful issue. For by an older charter than that of the Baconian philosophy, and by the express command of Him who can and will render the laws and forces of nature subservient to us, so far as our welfare is really involved in such subservience, man is encouraged to take possession of the earth, and subdue it: 'Be fruitful,' the Almighty said, 'and multiply, and replenish the earth, and *subdue* it.'

It is as though God had said, 'In virtue of those powers lodged in the human intellect, and in virtue of *numbers*, by which alone those powers (comparatively feeble in each individual of the race,) can be successfully exerted, aspire to a dominion over the external world, animate and inanimate; *subdue* it; yoke the laws and forces of physical nature in your service. So far as their subservience is really essential to your welfare and progress, they shall be subservient by *my* express ordination.' It is not only a command, but involves a promise and pre-

diction; as full, surely, of hope and encouragement to such as believe in the divine authority of the Scriptures, as can be the doubtful, however confident, vaticinations of merely mortal prescience.

But the failure of the expedition is also fraught with instruction. It is calculated to teach us lessons which we are all too apt to forget: the sense of dependence; the feeling of humility; self-knowledge; the consciousness that success, after all, must hang on a thousand favourable conditions, (some of them seemingly trivial enough), which man cannot command, and which yet must happily conspire with man's foresight and energy, or his uttermost foresight and energy will be all in vain. In the case of the Atlantic Telegraph, how small, how utterly insignificant an obstacle it was which once and again arrested the whole machinery of the great enterprise, frustrated all the forethought and sagacity which had been expended on it, and perhaps was the principal, if not immediate cause of ultimate failure;—an inch or two of wire which nobody suspected to be there, or if there, likely to do any mischief, pressed by the paying-out machine into the core of the telegraph! It reminds one of what Pascal so sarcastically says of the dependence of man—the Monarch of the world—on the veriest trifles in existence: 'Be not surprised that he reasons ill just now; a fly is buzzing in his ear; it is quite enough to render him incapable of all

sound deliberation. If you wish him to discover Truth, be pleased to chase away that insect which holds his reason in check and troubles that mighty mind which governs cities and kingdoms.'

Nor is it of little moment to remember that the dominion of nature which the great charter already alluded to guarantees to man, must be conjoined with a recognition of Him who alone can give effect to it. If there be indeed a God; if consequently it be both fitting in itself, and necessary for the true perfection and felicity of man, that man should recognise his relation to his Creator; if the sense of dependence, the attitude of fealty, be appropriate to him; we may be assured that, whatever the powers with which he may have been gifted, they cannot in the end be successfully exerted except in compliance with the laws of his being, and therefore in harmony with the relations in which he stands to the Supreme Lord. And how easily may He frustrate man's ambitious aspirations, if these are resolved to leave Him out of account; and that without any express interposition! It is enough to leave man to form and pursue chimerical projects—those vain shadows, to which there is no more seductive tempter than that arrogance of soul, which the ambition of being independent of God is so apt to inspire! How infinite are the mazes of error (seen in the history of all human speculation) in which he may be suffered to

wander, and in which he has been, in fact, so often lost! Infinite are the chimeras, the impossible achievements, in which he may lose his time and toil, waste his faculties, and squander his wealth. How often has he done so before, and never more often than when he has been deluded by the mere dreams, the fallacious hopes, to which spurious pretensions of science have prompted! projects as vain as squaring the circle, solving the problem of perpetual motion, discovering 'potable gold,' the *elixir vitæ*, or the transmutation of metals! projects, on which (as he once did on these) he may vainly waste years of intense thought and toil, which if wisely and legitimately expended, might bear the most precious fruits. It is possible to indulge chimerical aspirations after knowledge, as well as after dominion; and in both directions, 'vaulting ambition' is ever prone 'to overleap itself.'

It must be confessed that science has often, and not least in our day, been apt, (in the elation of past successes), to indulge in a good deal of bombast and rhodomontade about the destined triumphs of man over Nature; to speak in strong poetic license of 'making storm, flood and fire the vassals of its will;' as if science itself were to be absolutely independent, instead of holding everything as a mere feudatory under the Sovereign Lord; as if it were privileged to conquer by its own strength and in its

own right; and as if, also, there was to be no limit to its powers! It accordingly now and then gives a very different draft of its relations to Nature than that which is conveyed in the ancient Command and Promise just adverted to. Impatient of all control, ambitious of being independent, it is sometimes pleased to represent the forces of nature, not as auxiliaries,—which a Power, greater than they or it, *designs* to subordinate in a measure to man's will, and make subservient to his use,—but as hostile forces, which for the greater honour of man's prowess and the gratification of his pride, are perforce to be chained to his chariot-wheels and yoked to a reluctant service, because he, the human god, has so resolved!

In a similar manner, man is too apt to represent that indefinite, but still, at the utmost, moderate dominion which he is to attain over Nature, as *absolutely* without limit. Hence it is well that he should be taught the futility of this notion; now, by encountering unanticipated obstacles which shall baffle his wisest schemes; now, by the occasional outbreak of the more resistless forces of nature, before which man's power and skill are utterly impotent; which at once terrify and abash him when he is confronted with them. These last speedily, but effectually, teach the above lesson; they are like 'that Leviathan,' which the patriarch is challenged to tame, and to 'make

him his servant for ever:'—'Lay thine hand upon him; remember the battle; do no more.'

The earthquake, the volcano, the hurricane, the ocean in its fury, the 'pestilence that walketh in darkness,' teach man how limited, after all, is and must be his command of the greater or the more subtle forces of nature; that if they minister to him, it is at a higher bidding than his; that they are no mere drudges of his pleasure, and do not own him as their supreme feudal lord. One of the stanzas in Byron's well known description of the ocean is instructive in this point of view, though we may lament the misanthropy which spoils the sentiment of the verse, and laugh at the bad grammar which mars the close of it:—

'Man's steps are not upon thy paths,—thy fields
Are not a spoil for him; thou dost arise
And shake him from thee! The vile strength he wields
For earth's destruction thou dost all despise,
Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,
And send'st him shivering in thy playful spray,
And howling, to his gods, where haply lies
His petty hope, in some near port or bay,
And dashest him again to earth:—there let him lay.'*

Much more sweetly and wisely, because with much more of the spirit of humanity, does Scott touch the

* Strange! that the poet should not have seen, or seeing, should have refused to take a little pains to correct this gross vulgarism,—which is now immortal as the poem.

contrast between man's insignificance and Nature's vastness and grandeur, in the well-known strains in which he makes Staffa apostrophise the architects of the 'holy fane' of Iona :—

> 'Where, as to shame the temples decked
> By skill of earthly architect,
> Nature herself, it seemed, would raise
> A minster to her Maker's praise!
> Not for a meaner use ascend
> Her columns, or her arches bend;
> Nor of a theme less solemn tells
> That mighty surge that ebbs and swells,
> And still between each awful pause
> From the high vault an answer draws,
> In varied tone, prolonged and high,
> That mocks the organ's melody.
> Nor doth its entrance point in vain
> To old Iona's holy fane,
> That Nature's voice might seem to say,—
> "Well has thou done, frail child of clay!
> "Thy humble powers that stately shrine
> "Task'd high and hard;—but witness mine!"'

Man, no doubt, is destined to advance perpetually in knowledge, and consequently in power, (which is but its application): but though we cannot tell exactly how far he may go, we may easily discern that there *are* limits within which his uttermost achievements will certainly fall. Nobody expects to soar to 'the corners of the moon,' or to dive to the earth's centre, or to 'bore a hole to the Antipodes,'—as Voltaire maliciously feigns of Maupertuis; no one

expects any such things any more than to carry out the project of another satirical writer, namely, to 'equalise the temperature of the frigid and torrid zones by towing down the icebergs of the Polar Seas and hanging them on the equinoctial line to dry.' No one expects to shut the mouth of volcanoes, to arrest the lightning, to control the earthquake, to say to the stormy ocean, 'Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.' No one expects to banish disease, to abolish death, to make man immortal.

When the happy bride was smitten down the other day by lightning on the Alps, all that man's feeble electric mimic could do was to transmit the sad tidings home; and it was well said by one of the papers, that it impressively rebuked the braggadocio language, in which presumption too often speaks of man's 'triumphs over the forces of Nature.' His *spurious* lightning could only chronicle the terrible and resistless power of the *true.*

Man, no doubt, can do wonderful things; the discoveries of astronomy, the triumphs of navigation, the powers of steam, of the railroad, of the telegraph, show us how great and how true is that dominion which God has given him. By combined and continued action he can even appreciably modify climate itself. Still, in general, what he does is great only *relatively* to his feeble powers; for Nature works on

so vast a scale, that man's mightiest and grandest fabrics are comparatively little more than mole-hills ; the longest railroads, the deepest mines, are mere scratches and pin-holes on the earth's surface. And if he intermit or abandon his works, how soon with silent force does she cover the proudest monuments of his skill and labour, and bury them so thoroughly in her tomb of living green, that he can hardly dig out even the traces of them !

'Wonderful,' said a lecturer whom I lately heard—a lecturer most deservedly popular, but a little disposed to magniloquise on man's achievements, and to forget man's limitations :—' Wonderful ! that little man, taking his stand on this earth, should be able to calculate the distances, and, in a manner, speculate on the laws and physical constitution of Jupiter and Saturn.' 'Very wonderful,' thought I, 'it certainly is ; but as to "little man's *taking* his stand," that, my good fellow, is a sad mistake. He is *compelled* to take it, and cannot get away from it ; there he must crawl, much as if he were a pismire. He is tied by the leg to his planet : if it were not so, he would soon gladly "take his stand" on those distant orbs of which you are so eloquently disserting, and cease to *speculate*, because he would then *know*, about their laws and constitution. You ought, while deservedly expatiating on the "greatness," not to leave out the correlative "littleness," of man.'

It is worth while, especially in these days when men are invited freely to spend their money in promoting great scientific projects—and they cannot spend it better, provided it is not wantonly thrown away on plainly impossible or unremunerative enterprises—to remember, not only that there are obvious physical limits to man's power, when confronted with the more overpowering forces of nature, but there are far stricter *economic* limits also: that is, there are ten thousand great things which man might do, by mere numbers, time and industry, which it is yet certain he never will do, simply because, as we say, they can never *pay*. There are some things, for example, which man can make, which would never answer, simply because, when made, even the physical limits of his power would prevent him from using. He *could*, by perseverance and numbers, build a ship ten times as big as the Great Eastern, but it is pretty certain he never will, (in fact the Great Eastern seems a trifle too big for him); for in all probability, were it built, no one mind could secure that unity and simultaneity of effort, necessary for the effective management of it; nay, it may be reasonably surmised that no power that man could employ could launch it; and if it were launched, no skill in putting its materials together could keep them together, against the strain which such a mass would experience when placed on an unstable element.

As regards this last point, by the way, one of the most striking spectacles that can show the difference between God's work and man's, may be occasionally seen at the seaside. There we may sometimes see a large portion of some ship that has been wrecked, and driven to shore in successive fragments, collected together, and the several parts put into mere juxtaposition. There is, perhaps, nearly the whole ship, only without any connection of part with part. And what do we see? All that man has put together, parted, rent asunder completely, to the last bolt, rivet, cramp, nail, by the ceaseless grinding and crushing of the ocean and the rocks. But what nature, or rather, God put together, is for the most part, coherent still. Each massive timber shows traces, indeed, of the mighty forces by which the tenacity has been tried; the surface is abraded, rough and ragged with half-made splinters; but still defying, in its tough cohesion, the utmost fury of wind and wave.

To return for a moment to what I have called the economic limit of human enterprise. There are a thousand great things,—miracles of engineering skill, for example,—far greater than man has accomplished, which man *might* do, but which it is certain he never will do, simply because they cannot be remunerative. Wherever the result is simply so much superposition of matter on matter, or subtraction of matter from matter, or wherever the only condition of the work

is persevering and patient toil, there is no reason why man should not, by mere numbers, do things infinitely more wonderful than he has ever yet done; but the economical limit is as imperious in these cases, as, in other cases, the physical limit. If man can bore through Mont Cenis, there is, perhaps, no good reason why he should not bore through the Andes, if it could answer any purpose remunerative of the cost. For similar reasons, he might, if he pleased, erect a pyramid ten or a hundred times as big as that of Cheops; or level Mont Blanc spadeful by spadeful. But *cui bono?* And that question limits many achievements as effectually as though physical impossibilities stood in the way.

This question of the *economic* limit is specially interesting in relation to one important class of enterprises just now. To ascertain it, is the great *desideratum* in reference to the extent to which it is wise to resort to submarine telegraphy. Whether, indeed, there be not physical limits, which will render it impossible permanently to maintain a line through more than a certain distance, or at such depths as those in which the Atlantic telegraph now lies, is still the subject of most interesting experiment. *A priori*, however, there would not seem any impossibility of a physical character; nothing in the mere distance or depth that will impair the conductivity of the wire,

and nothing that will imply insurmountable obstacles in laying it. So, at least, the best judges say, and to a certain extent experience has confirmed it; for the Atlantic cable has been laid, and apparently *did* speak, or rather squeak, for a moment, though it died before it attained the full power of articulate speech. If it was born almost dumb, still it muttered something. The probabilities are, then, that in a given number of trials what has been done once may be done again. But whether it can be *so* done that the work shall last long enough to pay,—whether the economic limit be not, in this as in so many cases, far within the physical limit, it will be well for all speculators in the matter narrowly to consider. Unless it can be laid down so as to last for many years without any flaw in its working, it seems in the highest degree improbable that it can be anything else than a losing speculation; and for this simple reason, that whereas all submarine lines of telegraph, like other lines, are liable to accidents, any such fault occurring in a line of such extent as the Atlantic Telegraph, would seem not to admit of repair; and if so, the only remedy in case of a flaw, would be to lay down another cable. Now if interruptions in the Atlantic cable occur in proportion to its *length*, with anything like the frequency with which they have occurred on other lines; if the only remedy in any such case should be found to be the laying down of a new cable, and if

the laying down each new cable is to be attended with a cost at all comparable with that of the recent experiments, it is hardly possible to suppose the project can be successful as a *commercial* speculation. If it be, from its length, liable to more flaws than cables of less length, and if when these occur it cannot be 'fished up' and repaired like any other, but must be left to rot at the bottom of the ocean, and a new one substituted in its place, then it requires great faith to believe that it can ever be remunerative.

That there must be abstractedly *some* length at which this limit of *economic* impracticability must be reached would seem to be demonstrable thus: As a flaw or fault in a telegraph cable may occur anywhere, every yard laid down affords an additional chance of one. If sufficiently long, therefore, the occurrence of a very frequent accident will become almost a certainty; but the very same circumstance which makes an accident somewhere in its whole length so probable, namely, its length itself, will make it impossible to 'fish it up' and repair it; that is, we approach, at the very same time, a *maximum* of probabilities of an accident, and a *minimum* of chances of repairing it.

Whether the Atlantic Telegraph is of such a length as reaches or transcends this limit (and if it does not, it is hard to suppose that any other cable will, for it will scarcely be necessary to have one longer, or

so long), is the very point to be decided by future experiments. At present we seem to be much in the dark as to the length at which any one stretch of submarine telegraph can be depended upon for such a duration of safe working as will make it permanently pay. It may be that beyond a certain limit, say of 500 or 600 miles, accidents may be so numerous, and the difficulties of recovering and repairing a cable so great, that it will not answer to lay one down. If this should ultimately turn out to be the case, we must seek to achieve the Transatlantic Telegraph by one or more of the circuitous routes proposed,—taking only moderate portions of submarine cable at any one stretch. Thus shall we find the old proverb come true, that 'the farthest way about is the nearest way home.' And, indeed, if the stations and the line can be guarded, it matters not; for to the electric messenger it is all one, whether it has ten or a thousand miles to travel, more or less. To such an incomparable 'Puck,' it is of no consequence whether he be commissioned to knock at our next neighbour's door, or 'to put a girdle round about the earth in five-and-twenty minutes.'

In the meantime, we must wait with patience the result of future experiments; only here, as in other cases, let those who cannot afford to throw away their money, well consider whether *they* are the parties who are called upon to make such costly experiments.

Certainly, the hope of gain is not sufficiently definite to justify any one who cannot well afford to lose. Scientific men give the toil of their brain, their time and their lives, to these grand enterprises; it is proper that great capitalists should second their efforts by such means as *they* have to give, and take their chance of losing what they can afford to lose, or of gaining a great prize; of verifying the old proverb about 'making a spoon or spoiling a horn.' They may thus be great benefactors of their species, at the same time that they benefit themselves; and if neither be the case, they can sit down content to bear the cost. But let not those, who wish to make a little provision for wife and children, endanger it in the hope of doubling it.

Similar observations apply to such an enterprise as that of M. de Lesseps. There may be no physical impossibility about any such work, any more than there was about the attempt of Nero to cut the Isthmus of Corinth. That M. de Lesseps' project is not physically impossible is plain from what has been already said; for it is one of those which simply imply so much time, toil, and money. Man can supply all, if he pleases. But what will be the expense of the adequate maintenance of such a work—how long it will last without such repairs as will be tantamount to the cost of frequent reconstruction—how often it will be in parts choked with

sand—how often, for other reasons, rendered for a time *impassable*, and therefore for such time unprofitable, all this is matter of future experiment; and every one must wish that the cost may be borne by those who can afford to bear it. Perhaps the same may be said of the prodigious tunnel now in course of construction through Mont Cenis.

The 'Public' is often rebuked for distrusting, even deriding, the brilliant projects and inventions of scientific genius; which, it is said, are first laughed at as the dream of visionaries and enthusiasts, and then loudly applauded and eagerly adopted; while their authors struggle in vain to get a fair hearing for them, and too often die in poverty after having spent their all in perfecting some piece of mechanism which is to make the world rich, though it has made them poor. And so, when praise and reward are alike valueless, a statue and a niche in the Temple of Fame are voted by acclamation! The sad story has been too often told. Still, though it may be hardly worth while to enter on the defence of the poor 'Public,'—being, as Horace Walpole says, 'quite big enough to take care of itself,'—there is, notwithstanding, something to be said in its behalf in this matter. In its general distrust of new and startling discoveries, which transcend its experience and therefore its measures of probability, it acts pretty much in accordance with the very maxims of

that 'inductive' philosophy, the chief triumphs of which it is thus presumed to depreciate or despise. It is precisely because it has found pretensions falsified in so great a number of cases, in comparison with those in which it has found them verified; the number of projects plausible on paper, but impracticable; of machines that would not work, compared with those that will; of the number of flaming 'patents' and magnificent promises that come to nought; it is on these grounds that the world, and not unreasonably, exercises a preliminary distrust of high-sounding promises, of the probable fulfilment of which, in the *particular* case, experience can tell them nothing, and of the frequent non-fulfilment of which, *in general*, it can tell them so much. The world's incredulity, in fact, however lamentable may be the results in special cases, is a very philosophical incredulity. And the proof is found in this: that nobody doubts that if, in every case, or a majority of them, the promises of the transcendent success of new scientific applications had been fulfilled (as it has been in the case of gas, the steam-engine, or railroads), the 'Public' would long since have been cured of its imputed incredulity, and taken, as usual, its conclusion as to the future from an induction of examples in the past.

In truth, though this distrust of novel scientific pretensions on the part of discoverers and inventors

is a commonplace of invective against the world in general, it is by no means certain that the world does not quite as often run into the very opposite error; namely, of embracing every plausible project too readily and greedily; just as it will also take quackish nostrums in spite of large experience of their futility. For how many specious projects does this same unreflecting 'world' find the capital,—which it might just as reasonably throw into the sea!

Take, for example, the Great Eastern steamship. It is true that she 'behaved so well' in the recent expedition, that one cannot help forming more favourable auguries respecting her, and hoping that her brilliant future will obliterate the remembrance of her disastrous past. But whether it will hereafter be commercially profitable to employ vessels of so large a size or not, there certainly was enough, when the project was first propounded, to startle the doubts of a world which is accused of being so suspicious of novelties! It was, in many points, in most prodigious defiance of all the ordinary lessons of experience. A hundred things in her construction, as to which experience was silent, were perfectly novel. She was to be built without a dock, and experience had so little to say in the matter that she cost 100,000*l.* only to get her into the water. If she met with an accident, there were few ports in the world large enough to receive her; she drew water enough

to bring her within the reach of rocks, of the existence of which no charts could inform her; and once in her brief history she seems to have been brought by this very cause into the greatest jeopardy. As to the economic limit, it seemed yet more problematical. There was hardly a port in the world to which she could take a full cargo; and if she took one cargo for many, and made a voyage almost of circumnavigation in delivering it, she would lose in time, and its cost, the advantages of her larger freight. If she went only partially laden she would not pay the expense of maintenance,—as indeed was proved to be the case. It might again have struck the imagination, that if she was to have her complement of passengers and cargo it was hardly wise to send so much to sea 'in one bottom,'—'to put so many eggs,' as the saying is, 'into one basket;'—that if she should be lost, it would be the same thing as if a city were destroyed; that it would be on that account very doubtful policy of any government to use her as a transport ship; for if she went to the bottom, it would be tantamount to the loss of 10,000 men, without a battle. All these and a thousand other things might, considering the enormous novelty of this experiment, have powerfully affected the imaginations of people, and made them at least as prone to indulge in the imputed distrust of great scientific improvements as in other cases. Yet there does not seem to have been much

difficulty in getting the shares taken, and the money subscribed. Precisely the same may be said of the world's willingness to take up a thousand visionary projects launched by 'Companies' of all kinds; so that there is reason to suspect that credulity rather than incredulity is the prevailing temperament of mankind in this matter.

If none but large capitalists were ever engaged in such ventures,—if they who can afford to lose were the only persons involved, one would not much care about it. Where there is a reasonable chance of success, a moderate sum of money, if it can be easily spared, cannot be better risked or lost than in an attempt to decide the worth of some scientific project which may largely involve the progress of civilisation and the interests of humanity.

LONDON

PRINTED BY SPOTTISWOODE AND CO.

NEW-STREET SQUARE

00059674

Digitized with financial assistance from
Mrs.Padma Barve
on 13 March, 2020